

The New Criterion

September 2002

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Notes & Comments:

September 2002

Déjà-vu I

How many readers remember Frances FitzGerald's *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*? First published in 1972, the book was a sensation. It scooped up numerous awards, including a Pulitzer and the National Book Award. Ecstatic reviewers competed for superlatives: "the best book on Vietnam," crooned *The New York Times*. Waxing hortatory, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., wrote that "if Americans read only one book to understand what we have done to the Vietnamese and to ourselves, let it be this one." Quoth Stanley Hoffmann in *The New York Review of Books*: "An extraordinary book." Martin Bernal, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, chimed in with "a magnificent achievement."

There is a sense in which we agree with Mr. Bernal. *Fire in the Lake* really is a "magnificent achievement"—but not, however, considered as a work of reportage, which is what it purports to be. On the contrary, FitzGerald's book—which has just been republished with a new Afterword by the author—belongs firmly to the Jane Fonda-Mary McCarthy-Susan Sontag school of surreal political romance. Readers will remember the plot: the noble, peace-loving North Vietnamese are beset by nasty Amer-

ican thugs. Naïve American "idealists" rush to Hanoi where wise natives tell them all manner of wonderful things. What Samuel Taylor Coleridge called "the willing suspension of disbelief" works overtime as these privileged emissaries lap up lie upon lie and then rush home to disgorge them in the pages of the American left-wing press. In "Trip to Hanoi" (1968), for example, Susan Sontag told spellbound readers that the real problem for the North Vietnamese was that they "aren't good enough haters." Their fondness for Americans, she explained, kept getting in the way of their own efforts to make war.

They genuinely care about the welfare of the hundreds of captured American pilots and give them bigger rations than the Vietnamese population gets, "because they're bigger than we are," as a Vietnamese army officer told me, "and they're used to more meat than we are." People in North Vietnam really do believe in the goodness of man . . . and in the perennial possibility of rehabilitating the morally fallen.

What do you suppose Senator John McCain, who enjoyed the caring hospitality of the North Vietnamese for quite some time as a POW, would have to say about this idyll?

For her part, Frances FitzGerald dilated on the alleged continuity between Confucian-

ism and the Marxism-Leninism of Ho Chi Minh. "Like Confucianism," she writes, "Marxism was a social morality. Like Confucianism, it was also a science that described the progress of society through history." She spoke glowingly about the Communist "project of re-education, of changing human nature"—was it not a kind of "Tao, or, as the Marxists put it a 'style of work,' 'a style of leadership'?" FitzGerald allows that what she delicately calls efforts at "land reform" in the 1950s were a "total disaster." But she omits the little detail that some 50,000 peasants were murdered in the course of this particular educational experiment. Doubtless she agrees with the old adage about eggs and omelettes.

Like other specimens of this genre of political romance, FitzGerald's book is buoyed by two distinct emotional currents. One is the idealization of the native—all those altruistic North Vietnamese soldiers fighting with each other to be the first to share his rations with the American prisoners. The other current is unbridled anti-Americanism. "The U.S. officials had enmired Vietnam," FitzGerald writes toward the end of her book. "They had corrupted the Vietnamese and, by extension, the American soldiers who had to fight amongst the Vietnamese in their service. By involving the United States in a fruitless and immoral war, they had also corrupted themselves." We agree that there was an element of immorality about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. But its chief feature was the willingness to commit American troops without giving them the resources to win. It goes without saying that FitzGerald has nothing to say about *that* piece of immorality.

By the end of 1971, when FitzGerald was finishing her book, it was clear that if American troops left Vietnam, a bloodbath would follow. This of course could not be the fault of the Vietnamese: somehow America must be blamed. FitzGerald con-

trives to do this by inserting at opportune moments the name "Nixon"—at one time a reliable rhetorical prop that could be counted upon to conjure up the specter of evil. "If the force of the American peace movement has expended itself on obtaining American troop withdrawals," FitzGerald explains, "then Nixon may well succeed in compelling the Vietnamese to kill each other for some time to come." Got that? The peace movement forces the hand of weary politicians. American troops withdraw, whereupon the North Vietnamese promptly butcher their enemies. Who is to blame? Why Richard Nixon, of course. By withdrawing American troops he somehow "compels" the Vietnamese to slaughter each other. Here is the venerable philosophical idea of "action at a distance" updated for the terminally gullible.

When it was first published, *Fire in the Lake* was a hermetically sealed product: a moralizing passion play into which no droplet of reality was permitted to intrude. Time has not withered nor custom staled that infinite imperviousness. In her Afterword to this new edition of *Fire in the Lake*, FitzGerald adds Buddhist processions to Confucianism. But readers will search in vain for the terms "Viet Cong" or "boat people." There's a lot of admiring talk about "handicraft projects" and the revival of ancestor worship in this "sort of coda" to *Fire in the Lake*. But there is nothing about the fact that Vietnam is still a one-party totalitarian police state that routinely brutalizes its citizens. "With the reforms of the eighties," FitzGerald enthuses, returning to her Marxism-is-Confucianism gambit,

the government did something more than open up the economy, for in the Vietnamese context Marxism-Leninism was more than an economic system and an ideology. Like Confucianism, it was a social system grounded in a claim to an immutable, scientific understanding of human nature and the laws of history; it was also a set of ethics, and the ethics, or

“revolutionary virtues,” taught by Ho Chi Minh closely resembled those of Confucianism.

This of course is a calumny on Confucianism, whose teachings resemble those of Marxism-Leninism about as closely as a hippopotamus resembles a sparrow. Among the many questions FitzGerald might have asked, but didn’t, is this: Why was it that tens of thousands of people fled Vietnam when American troops left, crowding and overcrowding scores of rickety boats, risking—and, in many cases, meeting—death in a desperate effort to escape?

This is not a difficult question to answer. “Thousands of Vietnamese people and Montagnards were killed by the Vietnamese government and over one million people imprisoned in forced labor camps since 1975. Repression is so widespread in Vietnam today that the communist government has become one of the worst violators of human rights in Asia.” That is from a recent report of human rights abuses in Vietnam. You won’t find it cited in the new edition of *Fire in the Lake*.

As we write, the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon are only a few weeks away. All across Europe the percussive drumbeat of anti-American sentiment resounds; naturally, it finds a grateful echo in American universities and throughout the liberal media. Had the Afghanistan campaign lasted a little longer, Frances FitzGerald might have gone there to report on the “immoral” depredations of the American military in their efforts to rout the Taliban and al Qaeda. (Though she would not have witnessed any Buddhist processions or Confucian rituals, since the Taliban was even more “revolutionary” than Ho Chi Minh when it came to religious freedom.) Perhaps she will turn her talents to that task when the United States once

again forswears appeasement for action by eradicating the monstrous tyranny that oppresses Iraq and casts its loathsome shadow over the entire Middle East.

Déjà-vu II

Encountering Frances FitzGerald’s new edition of *Fire in the Lake* brought back all sorts of unpleasant memories: memories of burning buildings set ablaze by student protestors, of burning draft cards, of burning cannabis. For *Fire in the Lake* was very much the product of an era that idolized not only protest and anti-Americanism, but also the consumption of mind-altering drugs.

There has lately been a renewal of the debate over whether at least one of those drugs, namely marijuana, should be legalized. We do not propose to enter into that debate, exactly, though we would, in a kind of *amicus curiae* role, like to present the following report from an August number of *The New York Times*. It comes from a story about a six-month experiment in easing the laws against marijuana in parts of London. People caught smoking marijuana were to be let off with a warning instead of suffering arrest, the idea being to free the police for more serious business. David Reading, a “would-be record producer just out of college,” explained that he and his friends “really don’t see [marijuana] as a drug at all.”

Mr. Reading, who partook heartily of the non-drug as he spoke to the reporter from the *Times*, speculated that smoking marijuana helped him become more adept at skateboarding. “It’s not a dis—what’s the word?—well, I still have my balance,” Mr. Richards confided. “Although sometimes days go by—and before you know it a week’s gone by, and you haven’t done anything you’re supposed to do, like get a job.” Surely there’s a moral here?

The power of James Burnham

by Roger Kimball

The common-place critic . . . believes that truth lies in the middle, between the extremes of right and wrong.

—William Hazlitt, “On Common-Place Critics”

Americans have not yet learned the tragic lesson that the most powerful cannot be loved—hated, envied, feared, obeyed, respected, even honored perhaps, but not loved.

—James Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?*

“Who is James Burnham?” How often have I fielded variants of that question while pondering this essay! My informal survey suggests that almost no one under the age of sixty has even heard of him (“James who?”). And for most people over that magic age, Burnham is but an attenuated presence, a half-remembered, even vaguely embarrassing fashion that has failed to return—fins on the back of a model that was discontinued long ago for lack of sales. “Ah, yes,” speak the glimmers of remembrance, “author of *The Managerial Revolution*”—Burnham’s first and most famous book, published in 1941—“ardent Cold Warrior, helped organize the Congress for Cultural Freedom (remember that?), and . . . wasn’t he a supporter of Joseph McCarthy?” The answer is No—more on this below—but even the hint of an adumbration of a suspicion of “McCarthyite” leanings is sufficient to expel one from the ranks of civilized recollection, as Burnham learned to his cost.

The most notable exception to the oblivion surrounding Burnham is among people associated with *National Review*, the conservative fortnightly that Burnham helped start in 1955 when he was fifty. For more than two decades, Burnham enlivened the magazine’s pages with his spare but unsparing prose and editorial intelligence. He ranged widely, dilating on everything from foreign policy—his specialty—to (early on) the movies. William F. Buckley, Jr., the founding editor and perpetual *genius loci* of NR, called Burnham “the number one intellectual influence on *National Review* since the day of its founding.” In a just world, that would be patent enough for continued interest and recognition. But in this world, the combination of Burnham’s ferocious intellectual independence and unclubbable heterodoxy long ago consigned him to the unglamorous limbo that established opinion reserves for those who challenge its pieties too forcefully.

I wish that I could predict that *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World*,¹ Daniel Kelly’s meticulous biography of this sage political gadfly, would redress the injustice. But I suspect that Burnham is too idiosyncratic, too polemical, and too faithful to the dictates of intellectual integrity to enjoy anything like a general renaissance.

¹ *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World: A Life*, by Daniel Kelly, foreword by Richard Brookhiser; ISI Books, 443 pages, \$29.95.

I hope I am wrong. I hope that Kelly's book boosts the Burnham stock and prompts publishers to resuscitate his books. (All of Burnham's ten or so books are listed as "Out of Print" or being of "Limited Availability," i.e., more limited than available.) Perhaps Kelly, a foreign service officer turned history professor, will follow his biography with a James Burnham Reader: it would be a public service.

I should acknowledge that until reading *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World*, I, too, belonged to that unfortunate multitude which recognized "James Burnham" as but a name. I am deeply grateful to Kelly for dispelling my ignorance. For James Burnham (who died in 1987 after a decade's incapacity) was an astonishing writer. Subtle, passionate, and irritatingly well-read, he commanded a nimble style that was sometimes blunt but unfailingly eloquent. Burnham was above all a *rousing* writer. Immanuel Kant paid homage to David Hume for awakening him from his "dogmatic slumbers" about metaphysical questions. Burnham performed a similar service for the politically complacent. If he occasionally exaggerated the extent or imminence of the evils he described—Burnham was liberally endowed with what Henry James called "the imagination of disaster"—he was fearless in opposing and exposing the totalitarian temptation. Which is to say that he was fearless in opposing and exposing the most corrosive, most addictive, most murderous ideology of our time.

Today, Burnham is best known—to the extent that he is known at all—as an anti-Communist crusader. He was that. But he did not confine his criticism to Communism. On the contrary, he understood that the impulse to totalitarian surrender comes in many guises. The "managerial revolution" that he warned about was a revolution that aimed to repel freedom for the sake of bureaucratic efficiency and control. That revolution has not—not yet—succeeded in the monolithic fashion that Burnham envisioned. He did not, as his subtitle promised, so much tell us "What Is

Happening in the World" as what might happen should certain tendencies be left unchecked. But who can gaze upon the ever-increasing routinization of life and regulation of individual liberty in our society without acknowledging the pertinence of Burnham's gloomy analysis?

Over his long career, Burnham changed his mind about many things. He went from being a sort of philosophical aesthete to having a serious infatuation with Trotskyism—a form of Marxism peculiarly seductive to intellectuals—emerging in the 1940s as a prominent spokesman for an astringent species of democratic realism. But throughout the evolution of his opinions Burnham remained unwavering in his commitment to freedom. This commitment had two sides: an infrequently exercised celebratory side, which he reserved for freedom's genuine triumphs, and an oppositional side, which he lavished with cordial hostility on those opinions, policies, sentiments, and personalities that worked to stymie freedom. This dual commitment made Burnham an equal-opportunity scourge. He was almost as hard on what Tocqueville called democratic despotism—the tendency of democracies to barter freedom for equality—as he was on Communism. Burnham was a connoisseur of insidiousness, of the way benign—or seemingly benign—intentions can be enlisted to promulgate malevolent, illiberal policies. He descried this process as accurately in Western democracies as he did in Communist tyrannies, and he was tireless in his excoriation of what he called "that jelly-fish brand of contemporary liberalism—pious, guilt-ridden, do-goody—which uses the curious dogma of 'some truth on both sides' as its principal sales line."

Kelly observes that Burnham was "the living embodiment of what would later come to be known as political incorrectness." Kelly is right. Consider, to take just one example, Burnham's observation that most African nations were really "half-formed pseudo nations." Now, as then, that is indisputably the case, but how many accredited intellectuals have the forthrightness

to apprise Robert Mugabe of that inconsiderate fact? (Burnham was refreshing on many subjects, not least the United Nations and its disapproving resolutions about U.S. policy: "Why in the world," he wondered, "should any sensible person give a damn what some spokesman for cannibalistic tribes or slave-holding nomads thinks about nuclear tests?")

It would be easy to multiply such crisp interventions. Nevertheless, I hesitate to apply the label "politically incorrect" to so insightful and spirited a critic as James Burnham. In many quarters, calling someone "politically incorrect" has become a popular method of discounting his opinions without the inconvenience of allowing them a hearing. It is a clever, if cowardly, rhetorical trick. It allows you to ignore someone by the simple expedient of declaring his arguments to be beyond the pale, "extreme"—that is, unworthy of a place in the forum of public exchange. At bottom, the procedure is a form of political ostracism. The goal is to silence someone not by forbidding him to speak but by denying him an audience. This technique is especially effective with writers, like Burnham, who specialize in telling truths that most people would rather not hear.

James Burnham cut an odd figure in the world of intellectual polemics. He impressed his peers as both unusually pugnacious and curiously disengaged. His background had a lot to do with the mixture. The eldest of three sons, he was born in 1905 to a prosperous Chicago railway executive. His father, Claude, was a classic American success story. At fourteen, he was a poor English immigrant delivering newspapers at the head office of James J. Hill's Great Northern Line. Two decades later he was a vice-president of the Burlington and Quincy Railroad (among other lines), traveling with his family in a private railway car. In later life, Burnham objected to the description of his father as a "minor railway magnate," but the epithet does seem to cover the facts.

Even moderate wealth can be a segregat-

ing force, and it was one factor that set Burnham apart from many of his fellows. Religion was another. Burnham's father (who died of pneumonia in his late forties in 1928) was Protestant but his mother, in Kelly's phrase, was a "rigorous Catholic." Burnham grew up Roman Catholic in a world still mildly suspicious of Papist influence. Society did not snub the Burnhams, exactly, but neither did it welcome them without reserve. And if Catholicism was grounds for distance, so was culture. The Burnhams were a cultivated family. Art, literature, and argument were staple goods in the Burnham household. Young James was musical, like his mother, and delighted throughout life in playing the piano. He enjoyed an expensive education. When the Burnhams understood that their local parochial schools discouraged their charges from applying to Ivy League colleges, they decided to send James and his brother David to the Canterbury School, a tony Catholic institution in New Milford, Connecticut. Burnham performed well, brilliantly in English and math, and matriculated at Princeton in 1923. He majored in English, graduated at the top of his class, and went to Balliol to study English and medieval philosophy. Among his teachers were an unknown professor of Old English called J. R. R. Tolkien—I wonder if Burnham ever recorded his opinion of *Hobbits*? I doubt that it was flattering—and the suave Jesuit philosopher Martin D'Arcy. D'Arcy had a magnetic effect on non-believers such as Evelyn Waugh. But while Burnham gloried in theological argument, D'Arcy did nothing to salvage Burnham's religious commitments, which he shed without noticeable struggle while at Balliol.

Being an ex-Catholic is not the same thing as being a non-Catholic, and an ex-Catholic with a taste for theological argumentation is a decidedly strange hybrid. Burnham did not return to the Church until the very end of his life, but his Catholic upbringing and intellectual training served to inflect his intelligence in distinctive ways. In 1929, he went to teach philosophy at

New York University—a task he discharged for some two decades—and Burnham stood out not only because of his brilliance but also because of his tone, a combination of passion, polish, and polemic. One of Burnham's students, Joseph Frank, the future biographer of Dostoevsky, remembered him as "very sophisticated, very serious, and very intense."

Among Burnham's early colleagues at NYU was the philosopher Philip E. Wheelwright, who had been one of his teachers at Princeton. The two had corresponded for some time about starting a new literary-philosophical magazine, and in January 1930 (one year after the debut of Lincoln Kirstein's *Hound & Horn*) the first issue of *Symposium: A Critical Review* appeared. The first issue of the quarterly contained essays by John Dewey, Ramon Fernandez (the French literary critic who is probably best known today as a figure in Wallace Stevens's poem "The Idea of Order at Key West"), and the philosopher Morris R. Cohen. Burnham contributed a long review of I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*. It is a canny essay. Burnham judged Richards's book to be "the most considerable and the most formidable study of poetry . . . which has appeared in America during the past year." But he also noted that he could "not help feeling . . . that Mr. Richards's Defense of Poetry is more 'inspired,' more 'stirring,' and more *desperate* than any Sidney's or Shelley's."

To those of us who, however ardent may be our affection for poetry, do not look to it so entirely for the organization of our lives, Mr. Richards defense may seem most damaging to poetry itself; and poetry may appear through his efforts, as in the old twist of Pope's, faint with damned praise.

That is pretty good stuff.

Symposium had a run of three years. It was an impressive, if sometimes discursively academic, achievement. Burnham and Wheelwright snagged essays by Lionel Trilling (on D. H. Lawrence), Frederick Dupee (on Ed-

mund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*), Allen Tate (on Emily Dickinson), and Sidney Hook (on Marxism). Ezra Pound wrote for *Symposium*, as did Herbert Read, J. Middleton Murry, Harold Rosenberg, and G. Wilson Knight. The first bit of Ortega y Gasset to appear in English—a portion of *The Dehumanization of Art*—appeared in *Symposium*, as did important essays on Eliot (a major influence on Burnham's thinking at the time), Valéry, and other modernist figures.

In general, the magazine lived up to its announced ambition "not to be the organ of any group or sect or cause," which may be one reason that Burnham let it fold in 1933. In one of the last issues, Burnham contributed a long review of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. He was deeply impressed—that "remarkable book," the reading of which was "an exciting experience," had strengthened his conviction that "a major transition [was] taking place" in the world. As for the lineaments of that transition—perhaps "revolution" would be the apter term—Burnham was more and more coming to see it in Marxist terms.

Whatever the internal logic that propelled Burnham toward Marxism in the 1930s, there were also two important external factors. One was the Depression. Burnham looked around and saw the institutions of American society in crisis. The liberal nostrums seemed useless at best, malevolent at worst. (Burnham loathed the paternalistic, big government policies of Roosevelt, describing the New Deal as "Fascism without shirts.") The second factor was the philosopher Sidney Hook, who was Burnham's entrée into the world of "pragmatic" Marxism, Marxism (or so Hook thought at the time) with a human face.

Burnham was an idiosyncratic Marxist. It's not that he lacked fervency. On the contrary, as Kelly reports, he fell "head-over-heels" for Marxism and "labored mightily for the Trotskyist cause." Under Hook's guidance, he joined the American Workers Party and petitioned, agitated, organized, and above all wrote to further its aims. He

helped edit and contributed innumerable broadsides to publications like *The New Militant*, *Socialist Appeal*, and *The New Internationalist*. His efforts did not go unnoticed. Before long he was in regular correspondence with “the Old Man,” with Trotsky himself, and although they never met Burnham became a trusted lieutenant in Trotsky’s left-wing anti-Stalinist movement.

At the same time, Burnham always regarded the utopian strain of Marxism with a suspicion bordering on contempt. He had too low—too accurate—an opinion of human nature to be seduced by the promise of perfection. And while he did not repudiate violence, he was always alert to Marxism’s—to any bureaucracy’s—sweet tooth for totalitarian strategies. Burnham was also a social oddity among the comrades. In 1934, after getting married, he moved from Greenwich Village to Sutton Place, where he entertained in a style appropriate to that address. (For her part, his wife always seemed to regard her husband’s adventures with Trotskyist radicalism with bemused distaste.) It is likely, as Kelly notes, that Burnham was “the only Trotskyist to own a tuxedo.” When he summered with his family in Biarritz, he perused Marx and Engels during the day and played *chemin de fer* at night. His acquisition of a summer house in Kent, Connecticut, completed the contrast.

Of course, Burnham was hardly the only privileged beneficiary of capitalism to embrace Communism while holding fast to his bank account. But his intellectual independence made him an unreliable militant. Burnham happily immersed himself in Aquinas, Dante, and the Renaissance one moment, Marx and bulletins from comrade Trotsky the next. It was a giddy but unstable amalgam. Unwilling, as Kelly puts it, to sacrifice intellect to militancy, Burnham became an increasingly restless recruit. The break came in 1939 when the Soviets, fortified by the Hitler-Stalin Pact, attacked Poland. Trotsky justified the action as a step toward the abolition of private property (and how!), but Burnham saw it for what it was: a brutal land grab by a totalitarian

power. He wrote as much and in short order found himself expelled from the Socialist Workers Party and the object of Trotsky’s rage: overnight Burnham went from being a favored if sometimes wayward collaborator to being an “educated witch-doctor,” “strutting petty-bourgeois pedant,” and (the *coup de grâce*) an “intellectual snob.” Burnham’s response was to gather his correspondence with Trotsky and dump it into the incinerator.

By the end of the 1930s, Burnham was a minor but respected public intellectual. In 1938, he began a long association with *Partisan Review*, the premier intellectual organ of the anti-Stalinist Left. But he did not become an intellectual celebrity until 1941, when *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World* became a runaway bestseller—much to the surprise of its publisher and the chagrin of the several houses that had turned it down. Written at the moment when Hitler’s army seemed poised to overrun Europe, the book is a grim exercise in dystopian prognostication. It is not, I think, one of Burnham’s better books. As he himself later admitted, it is full of “remnants of Marxism,” above all the depressing aroma of economic determinism and praise for the superiority of central planning. But *The Managerial Revolution* certainly is a bold, an impressive book. Its vision of the rise of an oligarchy of experts and alignment of world powers into three competing super-states made a deep impression on many readers, not least on George Orwell.

Orwell wrote about Burnham at least three times, reviewing *The Managerial Revolution* in 1944 and then in long essays about his work in 1946 and 1947. As Kelly notes, Orwell found *The Managerial Revolution* both “magnetic and repellent.” Orwell criticized Burnham for “power worship,” for being “fascinated by the spectacle of power” (and hence contenting himself with analyzing rather than condemning Hitler’s early military successes). Burnham’s essential intellectual failing, Orwell thought, was in “predicting a continuation of the thing that is

happening." Nazi power is on the rise, *ergo* it will continue irresistibly; American capitalism is in crisis, *ergo* it will necessarily disintegrate—except that the rude, unkempt force of reality intervenes, transforming those *ergos* into "might have beens."

With hindsight, we can see that Orwell was right that Burnham underestimated "the advantages, military as well as social, enjoyed by a democratic country." His neat, schematic intelligence lulled him into believing that the (apparently) better organized nation was going to be the victorious nation. Burnham undervalued the advantages of the ad hoc, the unexpected reversal, the sudden inspiration. His "besetting sin," Orwell said, is to overstate his case: "He is too fond of apocalyptic visions, too ready to believe that the muddled processes of history will happen suddenly and logically" (Orwell makes the arresting observation that, during the Second World War, the smarter Brits were often the more pessimistic: "their morale was lower because their imaginations were stronger.") At the same time, Orwell repeatedly underscored Burnham's "intellectual courage" and willingness to deal with "real issues." And it is clear that, whatever his criticisms, Orwell was deeply influenced by *The Managerial Revolution*. In 1984, he adopted wholesale Burnham's idea that the world was reorganizing itself into three rival totalitarian states. *The Managerial Revolution* itself appears in Orwell's novel under the title *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism*.

From 1939 to 1941, the Communists worked mightily to keep America "neutral." Good Trotskyist that he aspired to be, Burnham, too, was opposed to America's entry into the war. His opposition persisted after his break with Trotsky. But it did not survive Pearl Harbor. The Japanese attack on the Pacific fleet precipitated a political metanoia. Overnight, Burnham became a vociferous supporter of all-out war against the Axis powers.

This hardening, or clarifying, is evident in his next book—considered by many critics to be his best—*The Machiavellians: Defend-*

ers of Freedom. Published in 1943, *The Machiavellians* is ostensibly an exposition of, and homage to, some modern followers of Machiavelli. Its larger purpose is to distinguish between the sentimental and the realistic in politics. Dante (in *De Monarchia*), Rousseau, and the architects of the French Revolution are prime examples of the former: they represent "politics as wish": noble, optimistic, ultimately futile (indeed, ultimately "reactionary and vicious" in Burnham's judgment).

Machiavelli and his heirs belong to the latter camp. They saw things as they were and faced up to unpleasant facts about human nature. Because they saw humanity as it was—in its imperfection, its treachery, its unceasing desire for power—they were the true friends of liberty. They did not exchange real freedoms for pleasant-sounding but empty idealities. They understood that all political freedom is imperfect freedom, won through struggle, preserved with difficulty, constantly subject to assault and diminution.

Burnham's political thought is often described as "hard-boiled." *The Machiavellians* is the cauldron in which the promised firmness is achieved. "All societies," he writes, "including societies called democratic, are ruled by a minority." Although the minority, the ruling "élite," naturally seeks to legitimize its power in the eyes of society, in the end "the primary object of every élite, or ruling class, is to maintain its own power and privilege," an aim that is sought largely on "force and fraud." Burnham had high hopes for "an objective science of politics"; at the same time he believed that "logical or rational analysis plays a relatively minor part in political and social change." The true friends of freedom budget heavily for the imperfection of humanity and acknowledge the relative impotence of reason in political affairs. Above all, they understand that the possession of power is inseparable from its intelligent exercise.

In terms of the evolution of Burnham's thought, *The Machiavellians* is perhaps most

important not for its exposition of power politics but for its implicit recognition of the value of freedom, “that minimum of moral dignity which alone can justify the strange accident of man’s existence.” As the 1940s and the Second World War unfolded, Burnham came more and more to understand that the preservation of freedom was primarily a salvage operation. And as the war hurried to its end, he looked on aghast as the West timidly made concession after concession to the Stalinist tyranny. In 1944, Burnham wrote a paper on postwar Soviet ambitions for the Office of Strategic Services. In 1947, an expanded version of this document appeared as *The Struggle for the World*. It is with this book, I believe, that Burnham comes into his own, for it is here that he first clearly articulates the opposition between the West as a precious heritage to be defended and Communism as a murderous tyranny to be defeated.

Was Burnham’s opposition “oversimplified,” as many critics charged? Doubtless it was. But it was also right in essentials and was, moreover, a salutary corrective to the naïve—and therefore deluded—advice of good-hearted liberals. Burnham understood with searing clarity two fundamental facts. First, that Communism was an expansionist ideology bent on world domination. And, second, that its triumph would entail the destruction of every liberty, intellectual as well as political, that we in the West held sacred and yet (perilously) took for granted—above all “the absolute value of the single human person.” Communism, Burnham saw, was opportunism elevated to a position of absolute power. Unchecked, no human good, not even the commitment to truth, can withstand its assault. Anyone who has leafed through Marxist-inspired writings will remember attacks on “mechanical logic.” But this, Burnham notes, is at bottom an attack on “the rules of objective inference and proof, the rules that permit us to test for truth and falsity.” The alternative, what is called “dialectical logic,” is simply a device that declares “whatever serves the interest of communist power is true.”

In terms of foreign policy, the fight against Communism required neither appeasement—appeasement was merely a prelude to capitulation—nor containment—containment was merely appeasement on the installment plan. What was required was a concerted campaign to undermine, to roll back, the Communist juggernaut. In domestic terms, the fight against Communism had to begin with the recognition that Communists used and abused democratic freedoms in order to destroy them. Their aim was the subversion of democracy. Therefore, Burnham argued, their capacity to subvert must itself be subverted. In the end, he thought, this meant that Communism would have to be outlawed. In the near term, it required that serious restraints be placed upon Communist sympathizers and agents. Would this be a violation of their civil rights—the right to free speech, for example? Doubtless it would. But because “Communism, in democratic nations, makes use of free speech in order to abolish free speech,” its own right of free speech had to be curtailed. (Burnham stressed later that great care would have to be taken to avoid lumping real Communists together with “socialists, liberals, honest progressives” and other “legitimate” critics and reformers.)

Burnham’s point, as pertinent today as when he uttered it, is that free speech cannot be understood in isolation, but only in the context of that which makes it possible, that is, in the context of democratic government and the functioning social community that supports it. “The principles of an organized society,” he argued,

cannot be interpreted in such a way as to make organized society impossible. . . . Any individual right or freedom is properly extended only to those who accept the fundamental rules of democracy. How . . . could any society survive which deliberately nursed its own avowed and irreconcilable assassin, and freely exposed its heart to his knife?

The publication of *The Struggle for the World* happened to coincide with President Tru-

man's speech announcing what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. This coincidence garnered a great deal of publicity—much of it negative—for the book. It also aroused the interest of the fledgling Central Intelligence Agency. Burnham, recommended by George F. Kennan, was invited to head the Political and Psychological Warfare division of the Office of Policy Coordination, a semi-autonomous covert branch of the agency. He took a leave from NYU—to do “research” the university explained—and moved to Washington.

Perhaps Burnham's greatest contribution while working for the CIA was to help found the Congress for Cultural Freedom. This organization, covertly funded by the CIA, was established to provide a liberal anti-Communist alternative to the Communist-controlled propaganda initiatives for “peace and friendship.” The liberal element of the Congress cannot be overemphasized: this was an effort to win over the liberal intelligentsia—forgive the pleonasm—to the cause of anti-Communism. Accordingly, in 1950 at the Congress's inaugural conference in Berlin, patrons and speakers included Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Benedetto Croce, Karl Jaspers, Jacques Maritain, Herbert Read, A. J. Ayer, Ignazio Silone, Sidney Hook, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Burnham was one of the few hard-liners. In his talk, Burnham tackled head on “neutralism”—what we have come to call “moral equivalence”—the “denunciation on equal terms of American and Soviet barbarism.” Burnham admitted the demotic nature of American pop culture. But tawdriness was better than tyranny: Coca-Cola might be bad, he said, but “not quite in the same league with [the Soviet labor camp] Kolyma.”

Burnham's tenure with the CIA (which, we tend to forget, was a deeply liberal institution) came to an end over the issue of “McCarthyism.” Burnham was ambivalent about the Wisconsin Senator: he was not, he explained, a McCarthyite but an “anti-McCarthyite.” He understood that

anti-McCarthyism was often “a screen and cover for the Communists and . . . a major diversion of anti-Communist efforts.” Reflecting on the phenomenon after McCarthy's death, Burnham noted that

McCarthy became the symbol through which the basic strata of citizens expressed their conviction . . . that Communism and Communists cannot be part of our national community, that they are beyond the boundaries: that, in short, the line must be drawn somewhere. This was really at issue in the whole McCarthy business, not how many card-carrying members were in the State Department . . . The issue was philosophical, metaphysical: what kind of community are we? And the Liberals, including the anti-Communist Liberals, were correct in labeling McCarthy the Enemy, and in destroying him. From the Liberal standpoint—secularist, egalitarian, relativist—the line is not drawn. Relativism must be Absolute.

Burnham's stand on McCarthy precipitated his deportation to political Siberia. Overnight, this influential public commentator became *persona non grata*. Philip Rahv, his colleague at *Partisan Review*, put it well: “The Liberals now dominate all the cultural channels in this country. If you break completely with this dominant atmosphere, you're a dead duck. James Burnham had committed suicide.” The irony is that Burnham, so astute about the workings of power, should have become a casualty of this skirmish: one might have expected him to negotiate the battlefield more cannily. Burnham emerged as an important conservative voice in the late 1950s. But, as William Barrett noted in *The Truants* (1982), Burnham never again occupied “the place that his own impressive gifts might have brought him if the intellectual climate in America, and particularly in its politics, had been different.” More's the pity. Because, as Daniel Kelly's book vividly reminds us, James Burnham's insights and attitudes—above all, perhaps, his allergy to political sentimentality—are needed now more than ever.

How good is the Kirov?

by Laura Jacobs

The Kirov Ballet is the company that the choreographer George Balanchine left behind when he sailed from Russia in 1924. It is the company from which Rudolf Nureyev defected in 1961, followed by Natalia Makarova in 1970, and Mikhail Baryshnikov in 1974. Formerly known as the Imperial Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre (named after Czar Alexander II's wife Marie), the Kirov is the great Russian mother company, a matryoshka doll hatching dancer after dancer—an infinity of dancers—from its Imperial School on Theatre Street, a continuum of star pupils that includes the legendary names Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Vaslav Nijinsky. The company that is today called The Kirov Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre—still Dickensian in its selection standards; still trained within the meticulous, luminous rounds of Vaganova technique; still a constellation of coaches pushing, pulling, their protégés to the top—she is always there, like Everest.

But we all have issues with our mothers. Perhaps no ballet company in the world is more daunting to write about than the Kirov. The company has a deep and detailed past which is the stuff of scholars, and a performance history that is hard to know given restrictions during the Cold War. And then there are the politics: the fact that Russian defectors escaped to the United States to dance; that it was Manhattan Balanchine chose as the concrete-and-steel setting for his New York City Ballet;

and that it was American dancers on which he built his neoclassical style. Yes, Balanchine cherished his years in the Mariinsky school, drawing deeply on the sights and sounds of his childhood, his Proustian connection to ballets scaled for a czar. Solomon Volkov's book *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky*, a series of interviews in which the choreographer talks about the composer, is a rich remembrance of things past in St. Petersburg ("Everyone thinks the tsar's box at the Mariinsky Theater is in the middle. But actually, it was on the side, on the right. . . . We would be lined up by size and presented. We were given chocolate in silver boxes, wonderful ones!"). Once Balanchine got down to work in America, however, he had to use what was at hand—no czars, no state school housing a classical tradition, no old world chocolates, but instead, strong, long-boned, USDA bodies ready to work hard to be classical. Balanchine had to start from scratch, and he began by establishing his School of American Ballet. Necessity would be the mother of invention.

What does this mean in practical terms? That Balanchine would choreograph to American strengths: a leggy athleticism, a competitive desire to prove oneself, a direct and down-to-earth presentation. He sought that quality of the quotidian that all mid-century American moderns were seeing as higher truth. "Don't pretend to dance," he would say," Suki Schorer writes in the first chapter of her recent book *Balanchine Tech-*

nique. It was another way of saying, don't pretend to be what you are not, dancers with a deep tradition. New York was a new world and this was a classicism dimensionally unmoored, thinner, more linear, more musically prodigal—not Genesis, but Revelations—a powerful next chapter in the history of classical dance.

Balanchine believed in both God and fate, and it is in keeping with the mystic aspect of his life that after leaving Russia and landing in Diaghilev's Ballets Russes he choreographed *The Prodigal Son* (1929), a dance with an angular, openly sexual pas de deux between a rebellious boy and a looming, elusive Siren, Felia Doubrovska of the long long legs. But Balanchine never did go home. He continued to heed the siren's song, and forever following that song, he made a repertory in the West that is its own world with its own metaphysics. In short, the prodigal ascended to messiah status, and in the last year of his life, when his *Catalogue of Works* was finally published, he kept it at his bedside where it was referred to as "the Bible." Hence, when the Kirov comes to New York, it's a bit like the Old Testament abutting the New, and a defensive sense of competing religions can creep into people's responses.

The catechism began in 1989, when, after a twenty-five year absence and in the flush of glasnost, the Kirov Ballet came to New York's Metropolitan Opera House with two Balanchine ballets included in its repertory—*Theme and Variations* and *Scotch Symphony*. At the time, there was much coverage of the event, emotions focusing on what a great step into the present tense it was for the Russians, and how poignant it would be to see Balanchine danced by the company of his upbringing. And it *was* poignant. But there was also a general feeling of uncertainty, a discomfited jostling over what the Kirov should be striving for in its dancing of Balanchine. There were those who wanted a City Ballet facsimile, who seemed to feel the Kirov was old-fashioned and outmoded and should just Go West. Why

aren't the dancers rolling through the foot like we do? Why aren't they faster, more forward on the hips? Why? For the same reason our dancers don't have the Kirov's gravity in stillness, or the upper-body energy to carry a fairy tale, a century, in their arms. It's not what either is trained to do. For those who excused the Kirov's not being NYCB there was magic in the company's *Theme and Variations*, in the way it connected tonally with the company's full-length *Sleeping Beauty* (also performed that tour)—the lullaby weight that makes the court palpable, a sense of forever that breathes in the bourrees.

The Kirov was then run by Oleg Vinogradov and the roster of ballerinas was a mixed bag. There were older women of great integrity like Tatiana Terekhova and Galina Mezentseva, but they were deemed Soviet in style and thus passé. Altynai Asylmuratova was the chosen one, having been earlier anointed in *The New Yorker*. She had a dark ardor, a Tartar princess face, but a faulty technique which she hid under excesses of line and a puffed-up posture. Yulia Makhalina was coming up fast, yet she too reached for extremes of line, her dancing as overdone, labored, as little Zhanna Ayupova's was modest, light. The funny thing is, the afterimages I hold from that engagement, the moments burned in memory, belong to the two women least poised to please on American terms. I still see blonde, plain Terekhova in attitude on pointe, fixed in space as if bronzed; and Mezentseva in *Scotch Symphony*, a wraith in pink tulle, a pinwheeling ghost.

Vinogradov favored the Makhalinas. In the early 1990s, perhaps in the reach to read globally, company style went to new extremes, the principal women becoming too attenuated and too deliberate at once, stretching *and* slowing (the worst of west and east). When the Kirov brought an all-Diaghilev bill to New York in 1995—an evening of *Firebirds* and *Golden Slaves*, velvet pillows and beaded bras—the company seemed to be at sea in the exotic, all slinky navels and snaky limbs. That was the season

in which Uliana Lopatkina surfaced, with her Theda Bara eyes, and body as taut as a tusk. Kirov ballet dancing was beginning to look like Russian ice dancing, a sort of skinny kitsch classicism shipped in for tourists.

But as I've written before in these pages, dance companies wax and wane, fade and blossom. And shortly after that 1995 engagement things changed. Vinogradov, an impassive man who ran the company coldly and unfortunately was getting it to dance that way, was expelled in a financial scandal. After an interim leadership shared by Farukh Ruzimatov and Makhar Vasiev, both Kirov principals at the time, Vasiev was made director of the ballet. And he was answering to Valery Gergiev, the uncompromising conductor who'd been artistic director of the Kirov Opera since 1988, and who in 1996 became director of the entire Mariinsky Theatre, thus bringing a blazing international spotlight to the ballet.

Who can say what is the best recipe for artistic regeneration? Certainly there can be none without raw material in the corps. But there must also be someone driving at the top, a leader with teeth and taste. Having a world-renowned musician at the helm of the Mariinsky has been a compelling development. And Vasiev, who directs the company daily, he clearly has an eye for talent, a gift for proportion. When the Kirov returned to the Met in 1999, with a restored version of its original *Sleeping Beauty*, it was as if the company itself had woken from a bad dream. Except for some super-high extensions à la seconde (leg up by the ear)—an instance of Kirov women catching an obnoxious western trend—the dancers looked at ease within their skin. The tempos were bright, the line was clean (so much hyperbole pruned away), and the dancing was big. Doing that *Beauty* seemed to jolt the company, remind it of something it was losing in the whole Western question. Kirov history, its theatrical values, its pride of place *and placement*—that Vaganova upper body which rounds out of the pelvic bowl to make the torso, head, and arms a sphere of infinite poesy—this was something to embrace.

Indeed, the change in Lopatkina was symbolic. So scary in 1995, with her sinews of steel, she returned softer, warmer. In the second movement of Balanchine's *Symphony in C*, she took quiet possession of the music, putting her strength at the service of phrasing, a performance that opened like an orchid. In fact, she outdanced any Americans I've seen in the role since. And it wasn't just Lopatkina. Diana Vishneva was setting a standard for fully articulated dancing, her whole body alive, and younger dancers Daria Pavlenko and Veronika Part were rising like cream. When it was announced a few months later that the Kirov was planning to take on Balanchine's monumental *Jewels*—a ballet exquisitely difficult to cast because it requires five phenomenal women, a tall order these days even at NYCB—it seemed not only perfect timing, but a gauntlet tossed with air kisses.

The Kirov came back to the Met for two weeks this July, with *Jewels* programmed for the last three days of the engagement, and a restored *La Bayadère* up at the front. Petipa's 1877 foray into Orientalism, *La Bayadère* is a story of doomed love between a temple dancer and a warrior—a sort of *Giselle* amid the palms and altars of India. As with *The Sleeping Beauty* three years ago, here was an effort to retrieve the original, to see what it looked like, and to trace one's own bone structure in the face of an ancestor. What the company found in *Beauty* was a colorful, brimming, and bumptious affair—a ballet not distant, misty, at all, as so many productions, including the Kirov's, had since become. What we find with this *La Bayadère*, dated to 1900 and pieced together from archives in Russia and at Harvard, is that it too was laid out with more leisure, pockets of concentrated choreography spaced between gay processionals. It's a different rhythm than we're used to, especially as we head into this new century, where third and sometimes even second intermissions are being dropped from full-length ballets, squeezing the ballets tight between babysitters and train

schedules—stressing the pace and distorting the shape. These Kirov restorations remind one that ballet is an art of the eye and the eye must have its rests. It is a reality Balanchine learned well. His first full-length hit in America was *The Nutcracker* (1954) and he admitted the Act I party dances were somewhat dull, prosaic—they were there to set up the imaginative flights of Act II. In this *La Bayadère* the surprise is the Act IV wedding, and it's a wow. No longer a stumpy remnant of an act no one quite remembers, it is now a vivid *ricercar*, with all the ballet's narrative and expressive motifs—life and death, prose and poetry, pageant and pas de deux—tightly interwoven, compressed, a fugue state in tutus. There is nothing in ballet quite like it.

But ballet is also an art of the ear. *La Bayadère*'s score by Ludwig Minkus, except for a few haunting melodies, is by-the-yard with only passing coherence (one minute it sounds like Tchaikovsky, the next, Offenbach). The restored score doesn't bring additional aural build to the ballet—the final momentum is all Petipa's—and despite the choreographic mastery of Act IV, one can come away feeling that other of the nips and tucks over time have a sense about them. A tighter *Bayadère* may be a better *Bayadère*. For where *The Sleeping Beauty* makes continuity, life, its theme, thereby benefiting from duration, a horizontal flow, *La Bayadère* is all vows and venom, a triangle between love, murder, and eternity. The distillation that has occurred over the decades, the cutting away of explanatory scenes set to shallow music (as when the ghost of Nikiya appears in Solor's room before his dream of her begins), makes for steeper narrative drop-offs, a terrain more in tune with this ballet of pitch and abyss.

And yet, just as in *The Sleeping Beauty*, it was inspiring to see these dancers engage with the wide vistas opening around them. When Vladimir Ponomarev, the High Brahmin in red robes, plants himself at the footlights, he might be a baritone braced for his opening note, pulling it up by the root. The dancers have a sense of theater—the spot-

light and the gaslight and the stage as a space without a ceiling, larger than life. Some might call this corny, but seeing it anew, art as unshakeable belief, I felt how much I miss it. I think audiences miss it too, which goes a long way to explaining why opera, a high art not nearly as audience-friendly as dance (even *with* super-titles), has the fastest growing following of all the performing arts. *La Bayadère* set the scale for this engagement as well as the standard for dancing, line that sings to an ideal, a line you see even in the men.

I feel sympathy for the male dancer of today. Our taste for superstars, for macho guys who've defected from somewhere, or who treat ballet as an artsy form of sport, is a law of diminishing returns. One need only look at the troubling trajectory of Angel Corella at American Ballet Theatre. So promising in his first years—pure raw talent—he seemed to be reaching for artistry, working with focus. But the last three Met seasons have seen him settle for cheap flash, hard sell, a giving-in you see in his physique, which has literally settled (his legs look thicker, his line shorter). Carlos Acosta, another technical wiz, joined ABT this season. He was formerly with the Houston Ballet, where much was made of his having come from Cuba (well, there aren't too many places left to defect from). We seem to need back story in our men, extracurricular derring-do. And yet the ABT season's most exciting performances from a male dancer came from Marcelo Gomes, a tall, dark, ardent young man whose most exotic bit of biographical data is that he studied with the Paris Opera Ballet. Gomes dares to care about classicism. He has gorgeous *épaulement* (the nuanced modeling of the upper body)—quite a bit better than most ABT women—and a yearning port de bras. In his debut *Giselle* with Paloma Herrera, the Act II dancing was so curvaceously wrought, so insular, it seemed they were alone in a bower in a bubble. You could see Herrera respond to this intimacy (who wouldn't?). She found a new softness in herself.

I can't say what will happen to Gomes at ABT, whether he will eventually give way to jock posturing, or will be encouraged to follow his lights. But I thought of him while watching the Kirov. "These men are not afraid to be beautiful." It is the first thing I wrote in my notebook, and the first flush of pleasure the company offered: men dancing with whole hearts (not an eye watching the audience watch them), and a refinement that reached to the fingertips. As Solor in *La Bayadère*, Andrian Fadeyev and Viacheslav Samodurov both performed mime that drew up from the tailbone, articulation something between animal and angel, a mammalian largesse. All the men seemed to be working in the grain of their particular gifts—Fadeyev's aristocratic dispatch; Samodurov's compact landings, swiftly torqued; Vasili Scherbakov's arrow-like loft and eiderdown aplomb; Danila Korsuntsev's rangy grace. No one was fighting to take the stage by swagger.

As the company moved through its program of *Bayadères*, *Don Q's*, and *Swan Lakes*, heading toward the floating castle that is *Jewels*, its greatest glory was revealed: the ballerinas. There isn't a company in the world as rich in the real thing. Diana Vishneva, Veronika Part, Daria Pavlenko, Zhanna Ayupova, Sofia Gumerova, Irina Golub (never mind that more than half these women are soloists, not principals). Coursing arabesques, beautiful feet, tight fifths, eloquent backs, legs raised and held like broadswords. The women, to a one, are completely pulled up in the spine, but with gravity, peace, in the shoulders (no pinching during the difficult parts, no stiff chins). It is an utterly integrated play between reach and roundness that creates this Kirovian aura of atmosphere, a volumetric glamour that's like an invisible stole, the night around the moon. When in *Don Quixote*, Natalia Sologub danced the Queen of the Dryads variation—a big sharp solo that no one can do anymore without jerking adjustments (it's full of swinging fouettés en tournant and sudden stops)—her freedom within its winging precision was jaw-dropping. She

might have been snapping open large linen napkins, then folding them corner to corner, crisp and neat. The house roared, as if to say, "so after all, it can be done."

The Kirov debuted *Jewels* back in 1999 in Russia, took it to London in 2000, and first performed it in America last February at the Kennedy Center. So it's been a winding path to the Big Apple. To see the company in this looming Balanchine after nine days of story ballets was to see them with nothing on but their dancing. And what a sight.

Balanchine choreographed *Jewels* in 1967, three years after NYCB moved from City Center to the State Theater at Lincoln Center. It was meant to be a big ballet that would fill the big new stage that was now the company's home. Did Balanchine ever imagine *Jewels* would be danced across the plaza at the Met, on a stage that makes the State Theater's look small? When the curtains opened on that deep, high, wide wash of soft green light, a cascade of gems swirling on the cyclorama as if shaken from a jeweler's pouch in Heaven, one's first thought was, it's like a hole in the universe, a vast outer space. This set was based on the original *Jewels* set, which was later redesigned; the current NYCB set has gems pasted on the cyc like a necklace laid flat. The difference in these sets, a fantasy of glittering riches from on high versus a glowing abstraction, is indicative of the differences in performance. Where City Ballet dances the three sections of *Jewels* (Emeralds, Rubies, Diamonds) as a state of mind, a multifaceted meditation on one theme—the tension between the quest and the capture—the Russians are attuned to fantasy. It's as if they're in a Balanchine theme park, a starry Disneyland romance of Fauré's France, Stravinsky's America, and Tchaikovsky's Russia—panoramas filled with fabled creatures.

It's intoxicating, the Kirov splendor in *Jewels*. Not only did they dance every step, they danced in a way that would have had Balanchine beaming—not because they move like Balanchine dancers (they don't)

but because the dancing is so rich and full and listening and large. Veronika Part, the company's Ava Gardner lookalike, voluptuous yet slim, luxuriant yet light, was a kind of milkmaid princess in the second lead of *Emeralds*. She filled the stage. In *Rubies*, Diana Vishneva shook it up like dice. This is a dancer who can do anything technically, but sometimes gets pulled off course by her own strong will (her Tuesday night *Bayadère* was an unguided missile, white heat, out of control). But *Rubies* is about will, and Vishneva gets it in a big way, treating us to a one-woman Broadway show—*Guys and Firebirds*. Hers was one of those giddy performances in which virtuosity, all cylinders firing, reads as wit and the audience just grabs on for the ride. *Rubies* as roller coaster! My husband, having spotted the NYCB director Peter Martins in the audience, said, "I bet he's poppin' a cold sweat."

I did not care for Svetlana Zhakarova, who had the opening night *Diamonds*. She is all extremes, with trick limbs that make one think of Sylvie Guillem, and a gluey plasticity that robs her dancing of spontaneity, accent. It doesn't help that she misses the mood swings in the music. Sofia Gumerova gave a persuasive reading on Saturday night, skating high on the icy surface of *Diamonds*, a City Ballet display of swoop and scale. But it was Daria Pavlenko, Friday night, who was the sensation.

Pavlenko is a beauty, with a face of Art Deco exoticism, as if drawn by Erté. Though offstage she's small as a mosquito, onstage she reads tall and has an endless line that could have come as well from Erté's pen. But she doesn't overplay that line. Pavlenko is one disciplined dancer, and she brings her own hushed momentum to the stage, an awesome technique that is flush with dignity, and music. Her *Diamonds* was all about hearing—the horns in the distance, the woodwinds rising, her own beating heart. She gave us plunges of emotion in steps wholly performed. Her fourth positions on stork points—huge and deeply crossed—were displays of majestic chiaroscuro. Her sous-sus, tight as a top, were star

bright and absolutely still ("at the still point, there the dance is"). And her arabesque—a gleam, a comet's tail. In everything Pavlenko did she was thrilling. But this, after all, is what a ballerina must be.

So what would Mr. B think of how seriously the Kirov takes certain formalities, how new-minted this makes the ballet look? That I can't guess. But the pas de trois in *Emeralds*, which the Kirov danced like three young purebreds trained and reined together—it was delight every time, an emperor's entertainment. And the four boys in *Rubies*—their uniformity of accent! They held formation like four wheels on a roadster, and revved up together like Hell's Angels at a stop sign. I loved the way they drove through. And the corps and courtiers in *Diamonds*! Under a blast of white light, and in white satin and tulle, the finale becomes a white act of its own, a union between two companies, a cosmic connection—"what might have been and what has been." This court climax is an evocation of the St. Petersburg of Balanchine's dreams—snowbound palaces and Tolstoyan balls. To see it danced here by the company of those dreams, and with such inborn symmetry and ascendance, it was like standing in the wings with Balanchine and seeing what he once saw.

It would be easy to use Kirov dancing as a stick with which to hit New York ballet companies. The Kirov arrived at the end of an ABT spring season of tired repertory, undistinguished (because one-dimensional) dancing, and too many principal women pushed beyond their talent (or unable to give because so unguided). It doesn't help that over at NYCB, a company bred for stylistic coherence, I saw a *Vienna Waltzes* in which the dancers were having trouble waltzing, let alone waltzing *as one*. And even among the most gifted young women at City Ballet, the dancing has gotten too thin, too divorced from fantasy, coquetry, poetry, love. This is why the company can't successfully cast a ballet like *Mozartiana*, a reliquary of all Balanchine believed in, a last masterpiece choreographed for Suzanne Far-

rell. The above-mentioned properties are each implicit in this ballet, and it is blind ideology to think they're not. It is also well to remember that Farrell, while rather bare branches up top, had a whorling volume from the belly down, a ripple effect that filled the eye and flooded the stage.

What we're seeing now is an odd reverse. Almost twenty years after Balanchine's death in 1983, we can't ride his coattails with such superiority. Our companies are in the same boat as the Kirov—no living choreographer of genius—but unlike the Kirov, our directors can't seem to bring up new ballerinas, at least not in such blissful batches. And where the Kirov has all of Balanchine to explore, so many NYCB dancers look all stretched out in him, with no place to go. And yet we continue to condescend, with the bean counters pointing out which step the Russians did wrong, which pose was not held long enough—missing, in the chance to wag a finger, the forest for the twig—and the village explainers trotting out Cold War clichés for a new generation, nonsense like: Russians go from pose to pose; or, Russians do squatty preparations for pirouettes (not true anymore, but everyone does a noticeable prep when it's built into the score, even Balanchine dancers). And here's one: if the Kirov watches us enough they'll learn how to dance. Actually, maybe it's time for us to watch them.

Nestled within those three *Jewels* was a Saturday matinée *Swan Lake*. I dread *Swan Lake* these days—you almost never see much company connection to the work any more, or imaginative thrill in the dancing. The search for relevance—with settings in different eras, or sexy new gender transpositions—is often little more than hip subversion or a marketing ploy (or both), a way to whip up interest for next year's subscription series. The staging presented by the Kirov, however, was standard Sergeyev, with no outlandish interpolations or outré sets. Just a Saturday matinée *Swan Lake*.

After the curtain came down on Act II,

I walked up the aisle for intermission and felt something strange—contentment. The pas de trois, which dancers usually treat as a career move, all forced and flashy, was danced by Scherbakov, Sologub, and Ekaterina Osmolkina with such faultless plush and gracious phrasing that it really did feel like a toast to civilized pleasures. And Veronika Part—it wasn't a showstopping Odette, but a fascinating one. That heavy lightness of hers, so appropriately sinking into a dream in *Emeralds*, was here a voluptuous problem to be solved, a wreath of languor from which to break free. Part's bust, plummy feminine flesh in the manner of Sargent's *Madame X*, seemed the stronghold of her mystery. She spoke with breast and back, plunging, twisting in her bodice—Odette as deep décolletage.

After Act III, again a daze of wonder. The national dances, in which we look so faux, were riveting, because the dancers know how to perform a czardas, a mazurka, how to toss their heads and wear their gloves and slide a foot on the floor as if slitting open a letter with it. In Russia it's their job to know these things. (The former Kirov dancer Vadim Strukov, an acclaimed character dancer, says of the mazurka, "it takes eight years in school to learn it. You work on it like a dog, and then you get to the theater and they still might not let you do it.") And Part, she ate space as Odile, charging the stage, legs reaching like a racehorse, and her arabesques unfurling with a swift mass that seemed to pull her back and away from her heart's desire, a complex physics I've never seen before. In my daze I ran into the *Ballet Review* critic Don Daniels, who spoke of Part's lower center of gravity, and how it offered a range of movement properties—centrifugal pleasures—we don't get from our lighter, more linear dancers. Yes. Pleasures of pull, not push, the tide inhaling under the waves. Here was a compleat *Swan Lake*, meticulously prepared from the corps up, every curve in alignment, the elements understood, a world created by the latitudes and longitudes of classical technique, and Odette bound in that net, its queen.

The myth of “premature antifascism”

by John Earl Haynes & Harvey Klehr

In 1984, George Orwell gave the Ministry of Truth the task of rewriting history. Under the slogan “who controls the past controls the future,” an army of scribes modified documents, changed textbooks, and re-wrote old newspapers to ensure that history conformed to every shift of the ruling party’s political line. Left-wing American historians have likewise been busily engaged in altering the past to buttress their conviction that Communists are the real heroes of modern history. Of all the historical myths promoted by the American left, few have been more fiercely protected than those about the Spanish Civil War, lionized as “the Good Fight,” a heroic struggle between fascism and antifascism, and the Communist-led International Brigades, a band of selfless volunteers whose brave deeds were immortalized in stirring songs (they won the battles, but we had all the good songs, Tom Lehrer noted).

In this narrative, the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade confronted the fascist menace in 1937, years before the outbreak of World War II finally roused the American government and the public from the torpor of isolationism and appeasement. An often-cited part of the story is that the veterans of the Lincoln Brigade, rather than being hailed for the prescience of their antifascism, were given the pejorative label “premature antifascist” and punished by an American government even then blinded by hatred of communism. *The Encyclopedia of*

the American Left, an Oxford University Press reference book found in many libraries, states that after the United States entered World War II, many of the Lincoln Brigade veterans volunteered for the American armed forces but “in a foreshadowing of the McCarthy period, the armed forces designated the Lincolns ‘premature antifascists’ and confined them to their bases.”

This assertion is a ubiquitous refrain in historical literature during the last thirty years. Ellen Schrecker, a historian at Yeshiva University, wrote that in World War II the Lincoln veterans “were, in the [U.S.] Army’s bizarre terminology, ‘premature antifascists,’ subject to harassment by military intelligence officers and, in many cases, sent to special camps where they were treated almost like prisoners of war.” Fraser Ottanelli of the University of South Florida insisted that the veterans “in the witch hunts of the 1950s were disparagingly referred to as ‘premature antifascists.’” Robin Kelly, a professor at New York University, wrote, “rather than applaud these men and women for risking their lives in a battle America would officially join in 1941, Lincoln Brigade veterans were hounded by the FBI, a variety of ‘un-American activities’ committees, and labeled ‘premature antifascists.’” Robbie Lieberman of Southern Illinois University stated that the Americans who fought in Spain “faced problems later because of what the government labeled their ‘premature antifascist’ stance.” Profes-

sor Bernard Knox (Harvard and Yale) confidently stated, "Premature Antifascist" "was the label affixed to the dossiers of those Americans who had fought in the Brigades when, after Pearl Harbor (and some of them before) they enlisted in the U.S. Army. It was the signal to assign them to non-combat units or inactive fronts and to deny them the promotion they deserved."

Despite all these confident assertions, "premature antifascism" is a myth. Not only is there no evidence that the United States armed forces ever used the phrase "premature antifascists" to describe those Americans who fought in Spain, there are indications that it was Communists and the veterans themselves who first employed the term. Moreover, many of the veterans were also "interim profascists" who in obedience to Soviet instructions dropped their anti-Nazism in September 1939 and opposed resistance to Fascist aggression while Germany conquered most of Western and Central Europe. Only when the Nazis turned against the USSR in June 1941 did the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade rediscover their antifascism.

No one has to this day located any documentary evidence that any American government agency coined or used the phrase "premature antifascist" to apply to Americans who fought for the International Brigades. Not until the early 1990s when our research took us into FBI, OSS, and U.S. Army records, the "dossiers" about which Knox had spoken, did it occur to us that there was no documentary support for the charge that had been repeated routinely for years. We examined thousands of pages and realized that the term "premature antifascist" did not occur. Government security agents rarely used euphemisms when describing Communists and other radicals and certainly nothing as coy as "premature antifascist."

Struck by the absence of "premature antifascist" from government files, we checked references to the phrase in scholarly literature. We could not find a single citation to a

specific government document. Instead, we found claims with no source, claims with citations to secondary works which had no source, and claims citing an oral history interview with a Lincoln veteran, usually made thirty or more years after the alleged event. In most of these cases, the veteran claimed that some government investigator had used the term in his presence or that he had seen the term stamped on his U.S. Army personnel records. But no one ever produced such a stamped personnel record. There was, moreover, no uniformity about what agency used the term and when it originated. Some scholars and veterans claimed the FBI was the instigator; others pointed to the post-World War II House Committee on Un-American Activities, and, most commonly, still others insisted it was U.S. Army counterintelligence in World War II. Nobody, however, produced a specific document.

One book that promoted the term, dramatically entitled *The Premature Antifascists*, was based on 130 interviews with American volunteers done between 1979 and 1985. In these interviews a *single* volunteer claimed that "the first time that [he] heard the expression 'premature antifascists'" came when military security officers interviewed him in 1942. Another says, "I realized how much 'the premature antifascists' as we were called, contributed to save the honor of America" but he did not indicate who did the calling.

Peter Carroll, an independent scholar with a loose association with Stanford University, published *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* in 1994. One chapter, entitled "Premature Antifascists," appears to have an indirect but at least contemporaneous documentary source for the governmental origins of "premature antifascist." Carroll discussed the experiences of two Lincoln veterans, Milton Wolff and Gerald Cook, in the U.S. Army in World War II. Both were assigned to Fort Dix, New Jersey, but inexplicably received no orders to report for basic training. Carroll writes:

Inquiries about the unusual delay brought mystified responses, until Wolff mentioned to a clerk that they had been in Spain. "Oh, that's a different story!" exclaimed the friendly sergeant, who finally found their records in a special file. A few nights later, Wolff and Cook sneaked into the office and read their papers. Printed on the corners were the letters "P.A." The next day, a clerk explained the initials: "premature antifascists." Thus they discovered a euphemism that would become part of anti-Communist rhetoric of the next decade. Service in the Spanish war qualified the Lincolns for that honor.

Although he is a professionally trained historian and author of several widely used American history textbooks, Carroll does not use the usual scholarly apparatus for documenting material in his book, and it is difficult to identify clearly the source for this story. It appears to be a letter Milton Wolff wrote on July 29, 1942 that is located in a collection of Spanish Civil War correspondence at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While this letter is not a government document, it would, nonetheless, be contemporaneous indirect evidence if Wolff in a private letter in 1942 made a claim of seeing the label "P.A." on his military personnel records. We wrote to the University of Illinois to obtain a copy of that letter, but it could not be found. We then wrote Dr. Carroll. He replied that he had seen the letter in Milton Wolff's possession and had just assumed that Wolff had later sent it to the University of Illinois. He also said "I doubt that these letters include the phrase premature antifascist." He provided, however, no alternative source for the "P.A." story in his book. Later when the issue was raised on an internet historical discussion list, he provided this explanation:

I cannot explain the "missing letters," since I read them before they were sent by Milton Wolff to the University of Illinois. However, I am certain that none of the letters referred specifically to the term "premature antifascist." My source for that reference was my inter-

views with Wolff himself. As he told me the story about ten years ago, he and another Lincoln veteran, Gerry Cook, were detained at Camp Dix (New Jersey) in June 1942, soon after they had enlisted in the U.S. army. To their dismay, other recruits were routinely being shifted to other camps for basic training, but they remained unassigned. Frustrated by this situation, they entered the camp's office at night and found their names on cards with the initials PA. The next day, they confronted a clerk with that information, and he supposedly said something like "oh, that's why you're not being shipped out." Prompted by the recent flurry of interest in this matter, I reinterviewed Wolff yesterday (May 24, 2000) about this issue. He now told the story differently. Only Cook actually broke into the office, so that Wolff could not, in fact, testify to the authenticity of the PA story. But he was sure that something in their records prompted the clerk's response the next day.

Carroll's new explanation effectively discredits the story he presented in his book. The source of the "P.A." story was an interview given forty-eight years after the incident and abandoned eight years later.

We also placed inquiries in the *Newsletter of the Historians of American Communism* in 1998 and on several history internet discussion lists in 2000, asking for a citation to a specific document showing that some government agency had labeled International Brigade veterans as "premature antifascists." We received many responses, but *none* provided a citation to a specific government document. New York Polytechnic University Professor Marvin Gettleman, then executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, responded in 1999 with the comment that while no document had been found "that may be because the relevant FBI files have not yet become publicly available. . . . But be assured that the search you call for is underway." In 2002 he posted a message on an internet discussion list devoted to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade indicating that as yet no such document had been located.

Some respondents cited oral history interviews and personal conversations, all from decades after the events in question and none adequate to document the claim. Others cited secondary sources, all of which we checked and none of which cited a primary source document. A few respondents suggested archival collections that *might* contain such documents. In so far as those could be checked, we did so and found no documents. The burden of proof that the government originated the "premature antifascist" label for Americans who fought for the International Brigades rests with those making the assertion. And the burden has not been met. Documentary evidence ought to be readily located in the many thousands of pages of World War II military personnel records and OSS records dealing with these individuals. FBI records are less open, but the Freedom of Information Act has made much material available. Congressional investigating committee files contain copies and excerpts from executive branch investigative reports. Despite extensive searches in appropriate archival collections by many people, no documentary evidence has surfaced. At a minimum, the claim made by numerous scholars that U.S. security agencies commonly labeled or stamped the records of Americans who served in the International Brigades with the term "premature antifascist" is false.

That does not preclude the possibility that some government agent on some occasion may have used the term or even written it in a document or reported that some third party used the term. Some such document may turn up some day. But until such documentation is located, the handful of oral history claims about this matter, assertions made thirty or more years after the events in question, are not sufficient to override the absence of direct documentary evidence and the near complete absence of indirect contemporaneous corroboration. That so many scholars and a pretended reference work such as *The Encyclopedia of the American Left* have disregarded scholarly standards in regard to "premature antifas-

cism" is a symptom of the myopia that exists in the academic world on issues that touch upon American Communism. When we publicly asked for documentation of the claims advanced about "premature antifascism," Peter Carroll was "amazed that serious scholars are so exercised about the origins of the term. It seems to me that the important point is that the U.S. Army during World War II did discriminate against Communists or suspected Communists, including Lincoln Brigade veterans. . . . Does it matter what they called 'them'?"

Yes, it does matter. Historians are not free to shade the truth, create dramatic illustrations out of their imaginations, or manipulate the evidence in the service of what they believe is some other truth. "Premature antifascist" appears repeatedly in the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s as a proud *self-reference* by Lincoln veterans, Communists, and others of the Popular Front left with only a single indirect claim during World War II that the government had invented the term. (In 1944 a magazine article claimed that the FBI used this label but provided no specifics and no examples.) As one of the respondents to our internet queries stated: "You will *never* find the term in official records because it was used by people who opposed Hitler 'too early' as in the Spanish Civil War as a self-deprecating term for their own ability to see ahead and the U.S. Govt's inability to see what Hitler was planning." It was a way of claiming credit for being antifascist in the late 1930s before antifascism became fashionable following America's entry into the war in December 1941.

But it was also in part camouflage to cover the opposition of the veterans and their supporters to assisting the anti-Hitler belligerents during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Only after 1970 did historians begin to blame the government for originating the term. Just as Peter Carroll contributed to the myth about premature antifascism, he has distorted the refusal of

the Communist veterans (and most were Communists) of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to fight against fascism from 1939 to 1941.

In his book Carroll wrote that sometime in the Spring of 1941 and *prior* to the German invasion of the USSR on June 22, William Donovan, an adviser to President Roosevelt on intelligence, arranged a meeting with Milton Wolff through "Dinah Sheean." At the meeting:

Donovan told Wolff that British intelligence officers, working in the United States, wanted assistance in establishing contact with resident aliens from southern and eastern Europe—Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavs, Austrians, and Hungarians—who would be willing to help the partisan resistance fighters in German-occupied countries. Donovan asked if the Lincoln veterans, particularly those with language skills, would participate in such an operation. Wolff agreed to find out. He knew that before undertaking such work individual volunteers would want the sanction of the Communist Party. Steve Nelson referred him to Eugene Dennis, an important party official. . . . Dennis gave his consent and assured Wolff that the party would cooperate, provided the scheme was kept secret. According to Wolff, in other words, the highest level of the American Communist party authorized clandestine operations that violated the avowed noninterventionist line. . . . The party's acceptance of Donovan's overture to Wolff thus represented an audacious departure from its previous distrust [of the U.S. government].

Carroll went on to relate that with the CPUSA's "permission granted," Donovan introduced Wolff to two British agents named Bryce and Bailey who asked Wolff to recruit "reliable antifascists to place behind enemy lines in Greece, Yugoslavia, and the Balkans." Carroll concluded, "So, at a time when the Communist party officially opposed American involvement in the war, Wolff started a recruitment program on behalf of British intelligence" and was paid a salary plus expenses. After the United States

entered the war in December 1941, Donovan asked Wolff to redirect his recruits from British intelligence to the American Office of Strategic Services, headed by Donovan himself. Wolff later entered the OSS and as an OSS officer worked with anti-Nazi partisans in Italy.

Carroll's account dramatically whitewashes the historical image of both the CPUSA and the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB is the veterans organization of the Americans who fought in Spain in the International Brigades). Both groups' acceptance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact had always been a historical embarrassment to their admirers. In the late 1930s Communists had been in the forefront of the fight against fascism. But the Nazi-Soviet Pact changed everything. From September 1939 to June 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, the CPUSA dropped its support for an antifascist Popular Front. It denounced President Roosevelt's efforts to aid Britain, France, and other nations at war against Germany and opposed FDR's reelection in 1940. The Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, led by Milton Wolff, tacked in parallel with the CPUSA and opposed all assistance to the anti-Nazi belligerents. After the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, all this changed. The CPUSA once again donned the cloak of antifascism, and the VALB called for American intervention in the war.

Carroll's story of the Communist Party and the VALB covertly continuing to fight fascism makes the case that antifascism remained at the heart of both groups' world view, even when it conflicted with Soviet foreign policy. In this account Wolff, the last commander of the Lincoln Brigade in Spain and chief of the VALB, secretly realized the error of the Soviet position and began helping the British *before* the Nazi attack caused Moscow to change its policy. Even more dramatically, Carroll asserts that Eugene Dennis, then the de facto number two figure in the CPUSA hierarchy, sanctioned Wolff's actions with the support of

other party leaders. Thus, "the highest level of the American Communist party," as Carroll put it, had also seen the error of the Soviet position and possessed sufficient independence from Soviet control that it gave permission for Wolff to work for British intelligence and recruit Communist veterans of the International Brigades for British covert operations.

If it were true, Carroll's story would require a major revision in thinking about American communism. But is it true? The answer is no. Everything that Carroll related occurred, but it took place *after* June 22, 1941, not before. With CPUSA permission, Wolff agreed to assist British covert operations but only *after* the Nazi invasion of the USSR and only *after* Wolff and the CPUSA concluded that assisting the British was in concert with the post-June 1941 Soviet policy of all-out support for the anti-Nazi war effort.

Carroll based his account on a 1988 interview with Milton Wolff. He claimed it was corroborated by other interviews, but cited only one, an undated interview with Irving Goff, a Lincoln veteran and fellow Communist whom Wolff recruited for this covert work. Carroll failed to cite a single document in support of the story, nor did he attempt to fit his account within the historical context about British covert operations in this period. In fact, there is abundant evidence that Carroll's timetable cannot be accurate.

The Comintern archive in Moscow contains a May 1942 report by Eugene Dennis about Wolff's work for British intelligence and the American OSS. The report confirms that Diana Sheean (Carroll mistakenly spells her name Dinah) set up a meeting between Donovan and Wolff, that Donovan asked Wolff to recruit International Brigade veterans for the British, that Wolff got CPUSA sanction for the project, and that Wolff set up a recruiting operation funded first by the British and then, after December 1941, by the OSS. However, this document placed the Donovan-Wolff meeting in

November 1941, well *after* the Nazi invasion of the USSR, and not before as Carroll would have it. The change of date robs the story of its ability to revise the history of the CPUSA and the VALB during the Nazi-Soviet Pact period. This document is corroborated by other 1942 documents in the Comintern archive. The NKVD judged that Wolff's recruiting might allow American intelligence insight into Communist networks in the United States and ordered it stopped. In the Comintern archive one finds a Comintern directive to the CPUSA to end the recruitment operation and a subsequent report from Dennis that Wolff had shut down his activities as directed. So, not only is Carroll's story wrong but the documentary evidence is that Wolff and the CPUSA refused to cooperate with American intelligence to fight fascism at the behest of Soviet intelligence even when the U.S. and the USSR were allies.

In 1982 the historian Maurice Isserman reported that Eugene Dennis's widow, Peggy, and the veteran Communist Gilbert Green told him that Eugene Dennis had met with and furnished Donovan with information on possible recruits for the OSS *after* the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. While Carroll reports that Goff corroborated Wolff's pre-invasion dating, this is contradicted by a 1964 Goff interview with the historian Robert Rosenstone where he said that he had been recruited for OSS work shortly before Pearl Harbor and well *after* the Nazi invasion. All of these sources support a fall 1941 date for these activities and contradict a pre-Nazi-Soviet pact date.

Wolff's 1988 claim that he worked for the British prior to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union is not even supported by his own testimony to the Subversive Activities Control Board in 1954. Wolff appeared as a witness for the VALB which was contesting the SACB proposal to list it as a Communist-front organization. He proudly testified that he had worked for British military intelligence and the OSS in 1941 and 1942 and that his work for the British had been at

the initiative of General Donovan, then a leading White House adviser. While his testimony was vague on the precise timing, he clearly placed his work for the British in the latter half of 1941, perhaps starting as early as July but still *after* the Nazi invasion of the USSR.

Even more damning, Eugene Dennis, who played a central role in the Carroll version of the story, was not *in* the United States during most of this period and could not have met with Wolff during the period claimed. The outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 had disrupted the usual channels of communications between the CPUSA and the Comintern. The frequent visits of high party officials to Moscow became difficult. But in the spring of 1941, the CPUSA dispatched Dennis to Moscow. The reports Dennis prepared and personally delivered before the Comintern leadership in Moscow in April 1941 are in its archives. The earliest is dated April 1, 1941 and the latest June 18, 1941. Given the conditions of wartime travel in 1941, Dennis had to leave the United States no later than mid-March to reach Moscow by the first of April. He did not return to the United States until after the Nazi invasion.

Could Wolff's meeting with Donovan and his consultation with Dennis have occurred prior to Dennis leaving for Moscow in March 1941? No, it could not. Carroll is vague about his dating of the Wolff-Donovan meeting; he says only that it was prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union and likely in the late spring or early summer. It could not have been earlier than May because in Carroll's account Donovan relayed a British request for aid in recruiting "resident aliens from southern and eastern Europe—Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavs, Austrians, and Hungarians—who would be willing to help the partisan resistance fighters in German-occupied countries." Germany did not invade Yugoslavia and Greece until April 1941 and the British expeditionary force sent to Greece was not forced to withdraw until May. It was not

until August 1941 that the British learned that significant remnants of the shattered Yugoslav army were regrouping under the command of Colonel Draza Mihailovich and not until September that they received reliable information about Communist partisans organizing under Josip Tito. The British Special Operations Executive (SOE) sent a small team into Yugoslavia in September 1941 to evaluate the possibility of British aid. Encouraged by their report, the British began preparing SOE units for deployment. The availability of recruits with appropriate language and ethnic backgrounds in North America persuaded the SOE to train its Balkan teams in Canada and it opened "Camp X" near Toronto in December 1941. This timing fits a Donovan approach to Wolff in the autumn of 1941, not prior to the German invasion of the USSR.

Carroll also reports that Donovan introduced Wolff to two British intelligence agents, one of whom was named Bailey. During most of 1941, S. W. Bailey worked out of the SOE Istanbul office. After the autumn 1941 decision to send SOE teams to Yugoslavia, he traveled to North America sometime in *late* 1941 to recruit men of Balkan background. Histories of the Canadian role in SOE recount his meetings with Canadian Communist party officials in early 1942 to recruit Canadian Communists who had served in the International Brigades. Bailey was not in North America before the Nazi invasion of the USSR; he could not have met with Wolff until late 1941.

Wolff's own words and actions in 1941 also contradict his later claims. He delivered the keynote address to the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade's convention in May 1941 when Nazi Germany had conquered most of Western and Central Europe. Wolff mentioned Hitler only once, in a sentence that denounced as equally evil "Roosevelt, Hitler, Churchill and Mussolini." The chief target of his speech was FDR's policy of providing assistance to

Great Britain, then the only major power fighting Hitler. Wolff told the convention:

under the dishonest slogan of anti-fascism, he [President Roosevelt] prepares the red-baiting, union-busting, alien-hunting, anti-Negro, anti-Semitic Jingoistic road to fascism in America: we accuse him. Turning with cynical calculation on his own lies and false promises, he drags the American people, despite their repeated expressed opposition, closer and closer to open participation in the imperialist slaughter in which the youth of our country will, if he has his way, join the 1,000 British seamen of the H.M.S. Hood, the 30,000 German bodies floating in the Mediterranean, the bloody and bloated corpses on battle fields the world over, for the greater glory of foreign trade and the brutal oppression of free people at home and abroad: we accuse him, Franklin Demagogue Roosevelt we accuse; tirelessly and until the people hear and understand, we accuse him. . . . We fight against the involvement of our country in an imperialist war from which the great majority of the American people can derive only misery, suffering, and death. We stubbornly oppose every move of Roosevelt and the war-mongers in this direction, and call on the American people to organize and make vocal their deep and sincere opposition.

Nor was this all. Some Americans who had fought in Spain with the International Brigades criticized the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Wolff had them expelled from the VALB and continued to treat them with scorn for the

next fifty years. Wolff claimed in 1988 that his public adherence to the Nazi-Soviet Pact was feigned but there is no documentary evidence to support him and a great deal that demonstrates that his assertions are not credible.

Equally false is Carroll's claim that prior to the Nazi invasion of the USSR, Eugene Dennis and "the highest level of the American Communist party" secretly dissented from the Nazi-Soviet Pact and supported aiding the British in opposition to Soviet policy. Not one word of such dissent has ever surfaced, either in the recollections of Communist leaders or the reports they sent to the Comintern. Dennis had a lifetime record as a Moscow loyalist. At the very time Carroll has Dennis undercutting Moscow's policies in the United States, he was actually in Moscow bragging to the Comintern about the enthusiasm of the CPUSA's campaign to defeat Roosevelt's policies of assisting Britain.

Peter Carroll currently serves as chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (housed at New York University), a project that combines research on the ALB with hagiography and efforts to honor Brigade veterans. His own efforts at whitewashing the veterans' subservience to Stalinism and gilding their efforts to claim victim status do not rest on any evidence or scholarly foundation. It may be appropriate to honor the Spanish Civil War veterans for their bravery but it is simply not true that the vast majority were independent of the Communist party and its rigid ideological line.

American sublime

by Michael J. Lewis

Is there a notion less American than “art for art’s sake”? When we invoke the doctrine, we usually mean the exact opposite. In nine cases out of ten, when an American speaks of the essential role of art he means that it can be made to do something useful. The nineteenth century, with its didactic tableaux, esteemed art as an instrument of moral instruction. The twentieth century mocked this attitude, even as it justified its own artistic products for their “consciousness-raising” properties. In either case, art is justified by what it does, rather than what it is.

Perhaps this is inevitable in a culture with an inherited Puritan ambivalence about the frank acceptance of pleasure, aesthetic or otherwise. And the doctrine of art for art’s sake is nothing if not a doctrine of pleasure. All it asks of art is that it arouse in us a sensation of palpable pleasure: by its tactile and physical properties, by the sheer and inefable gorgeousness of viscous color. Such a doctrine, quite understandably, has never taken deep root in America. There has been the odd exception, but generally speaking sensuous visual art, like sensuous food, remains a foreign import.

It is therefore fitting that our most successful artistic movement, in terms of popularity, should have been the most didactic of all, the Hudson River School. Its chief insight was that the natural wilderness of the continent might be treated as a moral text, a visual sermon in line and pigment. This message found a receptive audience.

The impulse to find a moral allegory in any given text is a deeply innate American habit of mind. After all, Protestant America sat down Sunday after Sunday to hear a short scriptural reading which was then subjected to prolonged formal analysis, and from which a moral lesson was drawn. Such exegesis was our nation’s fundamental literary experience. It would be a dullard indeed who could not see the presence of God in a golden sunrise, or the wrath of God in a lightning-blasted tree—or look at a solitary cabin by a pristine lake and not see Adam’s house in paradise.

Hudson River School painting is rarely accused of subtlety. The need for legibility and narrative clarity was a constant invitation to overstate and make obvious. At their worst, when most sentimental and cloying, it becomes unintentionally hilarious. Frederick Church’s *Our Banner in the Sky*, for example, contrives an American flag out of a sunset, a handful of twinkling stars, and the long red clouds of twilight. Widely distributed as an inspirational image during the Civil War, it is really an item of graphic art, virtually a political poster. Yet it is no more didactic, or its imagery more blatant, than the vast majority of American landscape painting.

That an artistic movement whose manner of thought was essentially literary produced work that functioned as did book illustration is not remarkable. This was in the nature of things. What is remarkable is that the same

Frederick Church could paint, two years later, *Cotopaxi* (1862), a spouting Ecuadorian volcano twinned with a glowering sun, whose chromatic richness and painterly sophistication is of a stupendously high order. Unlike graphic art, which functions by easily recognizable symbols, tending to the schematic—and which therefore loses little by reproduction in black and white—Church's mature paintings make sense only in terms of the sensuous interaction of color. One generation after the moralizing debut of the Hudson River School, with its tortuous chasms and prophetic tree stumps, it brought forth work as close to pure painting as anything yet produced in America.

This paradox pervades "American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820–1880," a surprisingly lovely exhibition which wrings fresh insight even from a subject as well-worn as this.¹ It traces in turn the formation of the school under Thomas Cole; its elaboration in the work of Asher B. Durand, Sanford Gifford, and others; and its transplantation to sites far from the familiar Hudson, to tropical rainforests. It also provides something of an exhibition-within-an-exhibition in the generous attention it accords the Luminists—that spare and introspective maritime variant of the movement. The selection of works is judicious, and has the rare virtue of being complete without being encyclopedic. George Inness aside, every artist who should be here is here, and with his finest and most representative work.

"American Sublime" owes its freshness to

1 "American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820–1880" was on view at the Tate Gallery from February 21 to May 19, 2002 and at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, from June 17 to August 25, 2002. It will open at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on September 22 and close on November 17, 2002. A catalogue of the exhibition has been published by Tate Publishing, London, in association with Princeton University Press, 284 pages, \$49.95 (cloth), \$34.95 (paper).

its origin at the Tate Gallery, an unusual vantage point from which to peer at the Hudson River and the Catskills. The curators—Andrew Wilton, Keeper of the Tate Gallery, and Tim Barringer, of Yale University—have sought to rescue their subject from parochial boosterism. Instead of celebrating the uniquely American qualities of the Hudson River School (a term they avoid), they connect it to international currents, among which the strongest was that radical new aesthetic category, the Sublime.

The notion of the sublime is surely the Enlightenment's most fruitful contribution to aesthetic doctrine. During the course of the eighteenth century, as artists and philosophers grew increasingly skeptical about the binding authority of classical precedent, attention turned away from objective beauty and toward the subjective nature of the aesthetic experience. A work of art was no longer to be judged by its intrinsic qualities—its perfection of form according to canons of beauty—but by its ability to induce a psychological state in the viewer. This was associationism, the doctrine that everyone carries within himself a storehouse of mental associations, taken from history or literature, which is unlocked by a work of art. Its ramifications were far-reaching. If all that mattered was the viewer's response, then a classical temple of glistening marble was not necessarily superior to a sham Gothic ruin cobbled together out of boards and plaster, so long as the latter unleashed a reverie of thoughts about medieval romance and piety.

It is easy to see that an art justified by subjective response alone might degenerate into aesthetic anarchy. But it was the great accomplishment of Edmund Burke to show that subjective responses, even those of the most extreme sort, could be analyzed rationally. This is the insight of his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which in characteristic Enlightenment fashion sought an objective basis for judging the subjective.

Burke was not the first to make the distinction between the sublime and the

beautiful. Three decades earlier, Addison distinguished between “sublime” Homer and “beautiful” Virgil, contrasting the heroic power of the former with the elegant refinement of the latter. Equally sublime was Shakespeare, whose reputation was rehabilitated as the eighteenth century came to accept his interest in depicting intense emotional states. But where Addison categorized different qualities of literature according to their properties, Burke sought to categorize different types of aesthetic experience.

For Burke the sublime was the exalted sensation produced by terrifying natural phenomena such as an ocean storm or an avalanche. Because they were connected with “ideas of pain or danger,” they produced the most intense of emotional responses. This was not mere titillation, as a roller coaster ride might give, but a profound encounter with objects whose immense magnitude and implacable severity overwhelms us with despair at our own puniness and insignificance.

Burke’s brilliant insight was to see that this sublime terror was more than mere animal instinct for self-preservation. Since it depended on our perception of formal properties—such as shape, texture, light and dark—it had an inextricable aesthetic component. At the end of the century Immanuel Kant further refined Burke’s analysis, but well before this the heady new doctrine was being applied to works of art. It underpins much of neoclassical architecture, with its blank walls and funereal character. It also came to influence much English painting of the early nineteenth century, particularly John Martin and J. M. W. Turner, whose joint influence ricochets through the exhibition (although that of Turner—rather rich for American taste, and not easily accessible until rather late in the game—is perhaps not as great as suggested here). By the 1820s, when Cole leapt to sudden fame, the idea of the sublime was no longer radical but something of an artistic commonplace.

“American Sublime” justifiably reasserts the centrality of Cole. Not only did he

launch the movement, codifying its characteristic subjects and devices, but he also established its intellectual and emotional stance. He was born in Lancashire, England in 1801, the son of a failed textile manufacturer, and he emigrated to the United States at sixteen. He studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. In 1825 he moved to New York and immediately set off on his fateful sketching expedition along the Hudson. In that same year the Erie Canal opened, and even as he went hiking in search of primal wilderness along the Hudson, he would have seen the first lumbering boats steaming downriver with their booty from the interior.

Under somewhat different circumstances, Cole might have been a fatuous maker of sentimental vignettes, for he was constantly pulled to bathos. What redeemed him from insipidity was his intense personal distress at the vanishing of the American wilderness and the sense that he was witness to the progress of a slow stately tragedy. “The ravages of the axe are daily increasing,” he brooded in his “Essay on American Scenery,” and his characteristically elegiac tone always contains a distinct undertone of foreboding.

Cole’s inspiration was the landscape painting of the seventeenth century, primarily Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa. From the former came his pastoral mode, settlers’ cabins and Indian braves taking the place of Claude’s classical ruins and Arcadian shepherds. From the latter came the ingredients of pictorial drama: the turbulent atmospherics, the convulsive topography, the ubiquitous tormented trees. “American Sublime” shows him paying homage to Rosa with his moody *Landscape with Tree Trunks* (1828), its obligatory lightning-struck tree writhing in the foreground like a soul in perdition.

Cole knew his sources almost exclusively through prints, like most American artists up to his time, and he tended to think in terms of tone rather than color. His technique reinforced this. He made pencil sketches on site, which he subsequently worked up into

finished canvases in his New York studio. Cole may have been a realist, but he disdained slavish topographic fidelity, conflating features and improving details so as to distill the “essential truth” of a landscape.

Like many American artists, from Copley to Bingham, whose provincialism was a source of freshness and strength, exposure to European art seems to have unsettled Cole. A prolonged sojourn in Europe from 1829 to 1832 did little to change his technique, which had hardened early. And while he met Turner, he did not emulate his chromatic vagaries. Instead he became convinced that he ought to aim higher in theme and conception, higher than landscapes with tree trunks. Out of these musings came two lofty and elevated painting cycles, *The Course of Empire* (1834–36) and the *Voyage of Life* (1840–42), the former of which is a highlight of this exhibition.

The Course of Empire is a mystic allegory of the life of a nation, shown as it passes through the millennia, advancing incrementally from savagery to civilization, and thence to degeneracy to collapse. The subject might be taken either as a grand summation of classical antiquity, or as an allegory of the British Empire of the present—or the America of the future. (Cole was already predicting for the United States “scenes of tyranny and wrong, blood and oppression such as have been acted since the world was created.”) The orgy of prosperity followed by violence recalls the apocalyptic imagery of John Martin, from whom Cole frequently pilfered, but his work was more than pastiche. Cole’s charming idea was to show the different states of civilization on the same topographic stage, a harbor beside a steep mountain, progressing from spring to winter, and from dawn to twilight. Here in a nutshell is the central insight of the American view of landscape—that the state of the land is an index to the physical and moral health of the society it cradles, and that the passage from wilderness to cultivation, while inevitable and desirable, is also fundamentally tragic.

As “American Sublime” shows, different

artists drew different lessons from Cole. His valedictory tone was embraced by the laconic Luminists—the triumvirate of Martin Johnson Heade, John Kensett, and Fitz Hugh Lane—who otherwise seem to have so little in common with him. But their wooden sailing ships were already competing with the aggressive modern steamship, and they were as doomed as Cole’s romantic woodlands. Here too nostalgia for a vanishing world was the keynote.

Likewise the Luminists also embraced Cole’s love of atmospherics, the fugitive effects of light, air, and clouds. Lane’s “*Starlight*” in *Fog* (1860), in which robust sunlight contends with low-lying fog and ghost ships loom in the near distance, is a triumph of aerial technique. But the consummate practitioner of atmospherics was Sanford Gifford, for whom the sun always hung low in the sky and the humidity hovered near one hundred percent.

Gifford’s favorite device was a view from on high into the basin of a valley, while he thickened the air to the limits of its ability to hold light and moisture. This veil of haze serves to heighten the sense of depth and distance, so in a work such as *October in the Catskills* (1880) we seem to be seeing as far as the curvature of the earth will allow. Here is no stately Claudian progression through planes of space, like the serried flats of a theater stage, but a plunge deep into the space of the canvas.

Humidity, however, is but one way to suggest spatial magnitude. Another is size. This was the favorite device of Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), a German émigré who came to the United States as a child. He returned to Germany to study in Düsseldorf, where so many antebellum American artists trained. There he learned a highly conventionalized German neoclassicism, marked by glossy finish, primacy of line, and punctilious draftsmanship. He also absorbed the chronic theatricality of the Düsseldorf School, a trait which, when exposed to the scenery of the Rocky Mountains, swelled to bombast, and to a stupefying degree.

Bierstadt spent several years painting alpine scenery before returning to the United States in 1857. The following year he joined an expedition to the Rocky Mountains, which he recorded in sketches and photographs. This resulted in his *Rocky Mountains, "Lander's Peak,"* whose tight German draftsmanship, unusual vertical format, and immense size (over seven feet in height) caused a sensation at its 1863 debut. Bierstadt successfully took the Hudson River School formula and adapted it to a landscape whose greatest contrast was *vertical*, from lush meadows and woodland below to mountains of almost arctic severity above. (Lamentably, it was shown only in the London version of "American Sublime.")

Bierstadt followed "*Lander's Peak*" with even bigger canvases. *Storm in the Rocky Mountains—Mt. Rosalie* (1866), is the second biggest painting he made, a leviathan nearly twelve feet wide. Its breathtaking rise is the vertical counterpart to Gifford's vast horizontal vista. Such leviathans forced the viewer to do precisely what he would need to do in the face of the original: crane his head to take in their panoramic sweep. Bierstadt himself liked the results and—ever the congenial career-builder—he turned out many paraphrases of these works in the next decade, augmented by several more expeditions to the West.

As stirring as such works are, they suffer badly from rote and formula. Bierstadt had the misfortune of having developed his artistic language before he tackled the American landscape, so that what he saw was always interpreted in the light of Düsseldorf convention. Apart from its trees and wildlife, his Rocky Mountains do not differ as much as they should from the Alps. In this he differed from Cole who, though working within a much narrower compass, was able to delineate with great precision the differing character of the Catskills, Adirondacks, and White Mountains of New Hampshire. Here the naïve artistic sensibility, working empirically, had an advantage over the well-drilled Düsseldorf professional, with his grab-bag of artistic motifs.

Bierstadt suffers here from being juxtaposed to Church, whose eye for the pictorial potential of a site was uncanny, as his encounter with Niagara Falls shows. For this there was no artistic precedent, precisely because there was no such feature in Europe. Prior to Church, every artist who painted the waterfall—such as Trumbull or Vanderlyn—placed it in the descriptive middle distance, treating it as an object in space. They painted it as Claude might have. But Church perceived that the essence of Niagara was the vast spatial void at its center. In his 1857 *Niagara* he placed the viewer directly at the upper ledge, eliminating the reassuring foreground and beginning his composition at the very moment where the fall drops away into vertiginous chasm. Startling in 1857, it remains so today.

The constantly shifting play of light and color in the mist of the falls was endlessly fascinating to Church, as several sketches reveal here. Again and again he set brilliant rainbows within the tumult of the falls, rather than against the sky, a feat that even Cole never essayed. Here too he towered above Bierstadt. Compare his *Niagara Falls from the American Side* of 1867 with Bierstadt's similar *Niagara* of about 1869. Both depict the same view, both a rainbow emerging in the mist. Yet Bierstadt's water is an opaque green, highlighted with flecks of foam, modeled entirely by changes in the value of the green, without the admixture of any other color. It unhappily recalls how Bierstadt began his career in 1850 by giving lessons in "monochromatic painting." But Church's water contains most of the colors of the rainbow above it. Depending on the color of the light reflected into it, its hue grades gently from blue to opal to violet. Here we come face to face with the central revelation of "American Sublime," which is not size but color.

The palette of colors available to Thomas Cole when he began his career was not terribly different from that used by Rembrandt. It was the traditional earth palette, made from pulverized mineral or vegetable

matter. These pigments were quite limited in intensity, and the only way to create intense, saturated color was to imply it by the skillful use of contrast. But early in the nineteenth century came a great explosion of new chemical pigments, particularly those based on cadmium, chromium, and cobalt. Now came colors with an intensity close to that made by a prism, pure refracted light, undiluted by baser matter. Swiftly these paints became available commercially. By the 1850s the artist had at hand something like the full range of the color spectrum, and quite close to maximum intensity.

A rapid stroll through "American Sublime" recapitulates this color explosion, as the earth palette of Cole and Durand gave way to an electric iridescence. It was not embraced equally. Luminists such as Heade or Lane, who tended to be neo-Puritan in mood and preferred the hard-edged flatness of colonial painting, worked happily without it. Among the first to capitalize on the new color potential was Jasper Cropsey, an architect-turned-painter who saw that the new pigments were suited to render the colors of American fall foliage. During the course of a triumphant two-year jaunt in London, he painted *Autumn—on the Hudson River* (1860), which stunned his English viewers. A view of New Windsor (between Newburgh and West Point), it depicts the village nestled in a brilliant blaze of Indian Summer of a nearly tropical lushness. The triumph earned him the sobriquet "the painter of autumn," and there followed a pageant of hot red and cadmium yellow forests.

Autumn—on the Hudson River was shown to Queen Victoria, who allegedly questioned its color-drenched foliage and the artist's probity (or his eyesight). Exultantly he sent for specimens. If true, the anecdote only shows how fundamentally naïve was Cropsey's approach to color. It is not sufficient to hold a leaf against its counterpart on the painted canvas to demonstrate its color. That color will appear different at ten paces and different yet at one hundred; moreover its color will vary according to the light thrown on it.

In fact, in "American Sublime," Cropsey emerges less as a colorist than as a colorizer. His color is essentially additive, and not integral to the design. However lofty or noble his subject, the executed work often has the sense of an architectural drawing, where a carefully constructed line drawing might be rendered in watercolor or ink wash. Moreover, there is little atmospheric perspective, trees in the immediate foreground and far-off distance showing much the same intensity of color. It has the glittering surface of mosaic, but also the mosaic's lack of depth.

How different was Church's assured and sovereign command of color, a comparison which "American Sublime" lets us easily make. Rather than fragmenting his color into intense local passages, he rigorously subordinates them to an overall chromatic key. As with a musical composition, there is a dominant key signature, against which contrasting harmonies resonate. The result is a ravishing color sensibility that falls precisely between the didactic sentimentality of the Hudson River School and the sensuous languor of the Aesthetic Movement.

Church did not wait for autumn, like Cropsey, to pounce on the color of leaves. Instead he was drawn to that part of the earth where the colors of the prism naturally appear at high intensity, the tropics. Modern transportation now put in easy reach the vivid birds, fish, insects, and flowers at the very moment when modern chemistry put in reach the means to depict their colors. Church traveled to South America in 1853 and 1857, producing the four sumptuous masterpieces on which his reputation rests: *The Andes of Ecuador* (1855), *The Heart of the Andes* (1859), *Cotopaxi* (1862), and *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (1866). All but the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Heart of the Andes* are on display here (although *Cotopaxi* was shown only in London).

In Philadelphia, *The Andes of Ecuador* and *Rainy Season in the Tropics* were shown in good nineteenth-century fashion, isolated in a reverently darkened room as spectacle

paintings, illuminated only by carefully placed spotlights. Together, they are easily the climax of the entire exhibition. To modern taste, the great arcing double rainbow of *Rainy Season in the Tropics* will seem garish and cloying. But it was painted at the close of the Civil War, when artistic sensibility was at its euphoric High Victorian climax. For this reason, it is good to see these works in Frank Furness's Academy of Fine Arts (1871–76), a similar product of swaggering High Victorian confidence, whose generously top-lighted galleries are the most appropriate setting possible for such work.

Any painter might find color in the tropics, but Church's chromatic curiosity led him to seek it everywhere. His most poignant color studies are his iceberg views of around 1860. *The Icebergs* (1861) was, once again, shown only in London, but in compensation are several oil sketches, one made on shipboard. Rather than treating icebergs as white sculptural solids, Church saw them as translucent mountains, pulsating with reflected color, from the deep turquoise of the water to the faint violet of the arctic sunset, a hint of divine presence even in the bleakness of the high latitudes.

Rainy Season in the Tropics marked the summit of Church's popularity, which soon began to fade. The society that emerged after the Civil War, with its different appetites and experiences, and its broader, more cosmopolitan outlook, found the homespun sentimentality of the Hudson River School cloying. Church, Kensett, and Gifford each saw demand for their work fall. Even Cropsey reverted to architecture in the 1870s, and the "painter of autumn" performed the ignominious task of designing the stations for the Sixth Avenue Elevated Train.

Although the paintings themselves rapidly plummeted from favor, the ideas of the movement permanently shaped the national life. Preoccupation over the changing landscape touched every aspect of American cultural and intellectual life, from the nature poetry of William Cullen Bryant to the

transcendental philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson to the picturesque landscaping of Andrew Jackson Downing. It produced more than words alone; the view of nature immanent in Cole's paintings took tangible form in our picturesquely designed suburbs and our national park system. Thus a didactic movement began by adorning the parlor wall and culminated in the sculpting of nature herself.

An odd and poignant vignette records this great leap from nostalgia to action. In 1849 Asher B. Durand painted *Kindred Spirits*, his tribute to Cole, who had died the year before. It shows Cole in quiet companionship with his friend William Cullen Bryant, astride a rock ledge. The background is a clever pastiche of two of Cole's most cherished passages of scenery, Kaaterskill Falls and the Catskill Clove. Above an eagle soars, hinting at the release of the painter's captive soul. At this moment Cole's legacy was passed to Bryant, then already working assiduously through his *New York Post* to promote the creation of Central Park, an effort that would be realized within the decade.

Kindred Spirits is, quite appropriately, the introductory work to "American Sublime." It does not matter that it is not very good, that its execution is slapdash and its conception is mawkish. It shows—perhaps more than any other painting in this exhibition—that the moralizing sincerity of the Hudson River School, if not an artistic virtue in any sense at all, might nonetheless achieve aesthetic ends. By dint of persistent effort and dogged empirical observation, a naïve school of painters transformed themselves from a literary and philosophical movement to an aesthetic one, without losing the sense of moral purpose that drew from them their unceasing effort. This is the most durable insight of "American Sublime," which tells this story with intelligence, grace, and admirable economy. Those who cannot see it at least have the consolation of its splendid catalogue.

Thomas Hardy & the warriors

by Jeffrey Meyers

The Great War in Europe devastated towns and villages, obliterated irreplaceable architecture, and destroyed an entire generation of young men. The survivors were conscious of living in a shattered civilization, and felt a collective lack of confidence and direction. In "Signs of the Times," written in the late 1920s, D. H. Lawrence described how young men under thirty, sick of war and materialism, have

a certain instinctive contempt
for old values and old people:
a certain warlessness even moneylessness,
a waiting for the proper touch, not for
any word or deed.

The aged Thomas Hardy had "the proper touch." His bleak but unflinchingly realistic vision profoundly appealed to traumatized war poets. Prominent survivors—including Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and T. E. Lawrence—made pilgrimages to the author at his home, Max Gate, near Dorchester. Drawn to him for personal and poetic reasons, they hero-worshipped the Old Master. He responded by encouraging them, praising their work, and accepting them, at the beginning of their careers, as colleagues. Hardy's complex and often moving relations with these writers reveal his great reputation and influence between the wars.¹ He helped them repair their ruined lives, gave them a living link to the tradition of English poetry, and restored their faith in cultural continuity.

At the turn of the century Hardy, father-figure to the Georgians, was the most controversial poet in England, and his reputation has continued to rise throughout the modern age. Ford Madox Ford maintained that he had founded the *English Review* in 1908 when no other journal would publish Hardy's "A Sunday Morning Tragedy." Robert Frost, who lived in England just before the war, exclaimed "Hardy's my man," called him an excellent poet, and praised him as "one of the most earthly wise of our time." Frost's friend and disciple Edward Thomas published an essay on Hardy in the January 1913 issue of *Poetry and Drama*. D. H. Lawrence composed his brilliantly idiosyncratic "Study of Thomas Hardy" the following year, and Lascelles Abercrombie brought out a book on Hardy in 1919.

In the "Study," Lawrence acknowledged Hardy as his master and wrote about his novels with admiration and affectionate understanding. Lawrence observed that there is in Hardy's novels, as Sassoon recognized when he read them in the trenches, "a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it. . . . Upon the vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can grasp, is drawn the little, pathetic pattern of man's moral

¹ The discussion of Hardy's reputation in R. G. Cox's *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (1970) ends, rather oddly, in 1914.

life and struggle." In October 1916 Lawrence called Hardy "our last great writer." The following month he placed him above the greatest masters of the novel: "They are all—Turgenev, Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Maupassant, Flaubert—so very *obvious* and coarse, beside the lovely mature and sensitive art of . . . Hardy."

In *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (1972), Donald Davie noted that "Hardy steered Lawrence, as for good or ill he steered Sassoon and Blunden, away from Eliot's and Pound's poetry of the ironical persona." But Pound consistently praised Hardy's poetry and in 1992 thought Hardy "woke one to the extent of his absorption in *subject* as contrasted with the aesthetes' preoccupation with 'treatment.'" Though Eliot, Joyce, and Ford were still alive in 1934, Pound claimed that "nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died." In 1937 he wrote that in Hardy's *Collected Poems* "there is a clarity. There *is* the harvest of having written 20 novels first."

In his "Apology" to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), Hardy warned readers that his poems contained some "grave, positive, stark delineations," and he quoted his credo in "In Tenebris": "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." The man who'd feared in 1914 that English literature might be wiped out by the Germans, now maintained that we "seem threatened by a new Dark Age" and (like the survivors of the war) wondered "whether the human and kindred animal races [will] survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe." In May 1917 he wrote Sassoon that he did not know how he could bear "the suspense of this evil time if it were not for the sustaining power of poetry."

Davie mentioned Hardy's "elegiac and indignant celebration of pre-industrial values," so cherished by the war poets, "which industrial technology had doomed." David Perkins described his natural world, "composed of grays, bleakness, emptiness, chilling winds and rain, yellowing leaves, and mutely suffering creatures, with signs everywhere of

dreariness, ominous threat, and blight"—the climate of suffering, relieved by his compassion and understanding.

Hardy responded deeply to the experience of war—the overwhelming event in the lives of Graves, Sassoon, and T. E. Lawrence. As Samuel Hynes observed, it "offered him a supreme dramatic example of the meaningless destruction which he found throughout existence." Hardy wrote many fine poems, including "Channel Firing" and "In the Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" which first prophesied and later described the horrors of the Great War. His finest work in this genre—"And There Was a Great Calm" (On the Signing of the Armistice, Nov. 11, 1918)—played on the phrase "dead calm" and expressed the qualities that most strongly appealed to the war poets: colloquial diction, sharp irony, cunning technique, complexity of theme, and clarity of vision as well as his characteristic sympathy and wisdom. The title comes from Matthew 8:26. During a storm at sea, when the men of little faith trembled, Christ "arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm"—which, in the poem, signals the end of the meaningless war. Instead of celebrating the conclusion of hostilities, Hardy suggested that peace now seems strangely unnatural and rather bitterly questioned why the war ever took place. Instead of offering a comforting answer, he rejected the Sinister Spirit's conclusion and merely repeated the unanswerable question at the end of the poem:

Calm fell. From heaven distilled a clemency;
There was peace on earth, and silence in
the sky;
Some could, some could not, shake off misery:
The Sinister Spirit sneered: "It had to be!"
And again the Spirit of Pity whispered, "Why?"

In a perceptive summary, Irving Howe explained why Hardy's poetry profoundly appealed to the shell-shocked Graves, who'd been severely wounded and reported dead; to Sassoon, who'd won the Military Cross and then been sent to a sanatorium (instead

of being shot) for opposing the war; and to T. E. Lawrence, who'd been captured and raped by a Turkish officer: "Hardy's ultimate concern is not with any immediate emotion, but with the consequences of emotion, survival beyond emotion: how a man lives through what it seems he cannot, and how he learns not to tamper with his grief and not even to seek forgiveness in his own eyes."

In October 1919, Sassoon had brought Hardy the "Poets' Tribute," an attractively bound book in which more than forty poets—including Graves, Sassoon, and D. H. Lawrence—"had each inscribed in Hardy's honour a copy of one of his own poems." Hardy was not (like many writers) a great egoist. Always loyal to his friends, he had the uncanny ability to respond to the younger generation. He, too, was a survivor, gratified that his work was still highly regarded by the postwar poets and pleased that he himself was admired by war heroes. The "Tribute," Hardy wrote using the third person, "was almost his first awakening to the consciousness that an opinion had silently grown up as it were in the night that he was no mean power in the contemporary world of poetry."

Augustus John's great portrait of 1923 vividly captures the physical presence of the eighty-three-year-old Hardy. In three-quarter view, seated in front of a crowded bookcase, with bald dome, raised antenna-like eyebrows, beaky red nose, drooping mustache, and quizzical expression, Hardy grasps the lapels of his thick gray suit and stares clear-sightedly ahead, ruminating on the sad fate of mankind and on his own approaching death. The last of the great Victorian writers, Hardy was the only one to span the Edwardian and Georgian periods and take an active role in postwar literature—a modern without being a modernist. He'd attacked conventional religion and sexual morality, and after the fierce controversy aroused by *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* had stopped writing novels in 1895. But he was still subversive and startling, and published two volumes of poetry after *The Waste Land* had appeared: *Human*

Shows (1925) and, at the age of eighty-eight, *Winter Words* (1928). Robert Graves later remarked that it was rare "to find a case like Hardy, who stopped writing poems for several decades then picked it up again in his sixties and went on to the eighties." In *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry* (1925), Graves rejected most of his contemporaries and firmly aligned himself with the themes and style of Hardy and Robert Frost.

Graves first met Hardy when the older poet was awarded an honorary degree at Oxford in February 1920. That August Graves bicycled from Oxford to Dorchester to pay homage to the master, and later recorded his impressions in his autobiography, *Goodbye to All That* (1929). Hardy heartened Graves by emphasizing inspiration rather than revision: "I have never in my life taken more than three, or perhaps four, drafts for a poem. I am afraid of it losing its freshness." And he encouraged Graves's natural inclination to reject technical experiment and write in traditional forms: "In his opinion, *vers libre* could come to nothing in England. 'All we can do is to write on the old themes in the old styles, but try to do a little better than those who went before us.'"

Hardy also struck a sympathetic chord by expressing respect for military officers and compassion for ordinary men. When Graves responded to Hardy's query and said he no longer used his army rank, Hardy insisted: "But you have a right to it; I should certainly keep my rank if I had one, and feel very proud to be called Captain Hardy." Referring to his own war work, he said that serving on the committee to prevent war-profiteering "was a hundred times better than sitting on a Military Tribunal and sending young men to the war who did not want to go." A few days after the visit, Graves told Edmund Blunden, another great admirer, who would write a book on Hardy in 1942, that Hardy had "exceeded the most extreme expectations. Marvellous man!"

Three years later, in September 1923, T. E. Lawrence, another Hardy-worshipper, told Graves (then writing Lawrence's biography)

an anecdote that Graves adapted to his own purposes. Lawrence, who would later translate the *Odyssey*, “said something a little reflecting on Homer: and he took me up at once, saying that it was not to be despised: that it was very kin to *Marmion*.” Lawrence emphasized Hardy’s self-assurance and was impressed by the “man to whom Homer and Scott are companions: who feels easy in such presences.” Reporting the incident to Siegfried Sassoon in 1925, Graves subtly changed the emphasis to make Hardy’s judgment seem somewhat absurd: “Lawrence and the Hardies are inseparable now it appears. It was to Lawrence that T. H. made his magnificently Hardyish remark. Lawrence had said something a trifle disrespectful of Homer and T. H. replied rather warmly: ‘Really, I have a far higher opinion [of it] than of the *Iliad*. It reminds me at times of *Marmion*.’” This favorite and now familiar anecdote resurfaced in *Goodbye to All That* with a pointed comment that again seemed to denigrate Hardy: “when Lawrence ventured to say something disparaging about Homer’s *Iliad*, he protested: ‘Oh, but I admire it greatly. Why, it’s in the *Marmion* class!’ Lawrence at first thought that Hardy was having a little joke.”

Sassoon, who knew Hardy much better than Graves did, sprang to his defense and strongly objected to what he considered Graves’s intrusive and egoistic account.

Your article on Max Gate made things worse. As you ought to know, T. H. was an essentially *private* character. And the spectacle of the self-advertising antics of literary men exploiting their acquaintance with T. H. maddened me; and your article made me feel that you were making fun of him. There was too much about yourself and too little about his greatness. (The picture of him in your book is misleading, because it shows his simplicity without his impressiveness. Also you have got the *Marmion* anecdote wrong.)

Though Hardy’s precise meaning remains obscure, he was far too shrewd to equate Scott with Homer. Most probably, he was

reminding Lawrence, who admired his judgment, that Scott’s long poem on the sixteenth-century battle of Flodden Field had once been held in very high esteem. Hardy himself had called it “the most Homeric poem in the English language.” By changing Hardy’s words from “very kin to *Marmion*” to “It reminds me at times of *Marmion*” to “it’s in the *Marmion* class!” Graves enlivened the story but distorted the truth.

Sassoon’s uncle, the sculptor Sir Hamo Thornycroft, was a friend of Hardy and had introduced his nephew to the poet. Hardy’s fictional vision of rural England had consoled Sassoon at the battlefield, and his *Satires of Circumstance* influenced the bitterly satirical war poems that established Sassoon’s reputation in 1920. In 1917 Hardy had accepted the dedication of Sassoon’s *Old Huntsman*. Christie’s 1975 catalogue of *The Library of the Late Siegfried Sassoon* lists seven presentation copies of Hardy’s books; fourteen postcards and letters from Sassoon to Hardy; a holograph reproduction of “Catafalque,” his uncollected elegy on Hardy; and numerous references to Hardy in his correspondence with Graves, Lawrence, Edmund Gosse, and Sir Sydney Cockerell.

Sassoon’s postwar *Diaries* contain many descriptions of his visits to Max Gate. On November 7, 1918—four days before the Armistice and two years before Graves turned up—Sassoon found Hardy “Frail and rather gnome-like in the candle-shine and dim room, with his large round head, vast brow, beaky nose and pendulous grey mustache.” He believed in the nourishing power of art and told Sassoon that he “feared (in 1914) more than anything else that English literature might be wiped out by the Germans.”

In February 1921 the thirty-three-year-old Sassoon was tremendously impressed by Hardy’s physical agility and intellectual liveliness, and by an old age that made him seem rooted in the earth: “He is *no* age at all. . . . With the rural antiquity of an old tree or house but . . . eager and interested like a young man—and yet so wise, for all his simplicity.” In the early 1920s, Sassoon

noted that Hardy was chirpy, talkative, and responsive to jokes. "Still full of *curiosity* about the world" and with a remarkable interest in current affairs, he had "the face of one who has suffered intensely, a face of almost unearthly wisdom." Hardy took him back to the past (while Sassoon kept him in touch with the present) and seeing him, Sassoon felt, was "no doubt one of the precious experiences of my life."

In September 1925 Sassoon recorded that the sprightly Hardy "once again amazed me by his vigour of mind and body." Two years later, in a letter to Edmund Gosse, he described Hardy's most characteristic attitude—less formal and more relaxed than in the portrait by Augustus John:

"Perched on the least *easy* chair, supporting his head with one hand, & gazing downward with a gentle & rather wistful expression." I noticed this evening—when the half-lit room was dealing gently with his face—the great beauty of his expression. There were some indications of an increasing weariness—"I think I've had enough of Napoleon!" he confessed to Sassoon [alluding to *The Dynasts*] on that same occasion—but no obvious slackening either of creative activity or of literary caretaking.

Sassoon's attitude to Hardy in his autobiography, *Siegfried's Journey, 1916–1920*, provides an adoring complement to Graves's more critical *Goodbye to All That*:

[His] modesty was instinctive and quite unaffected. . . . He was, in fact, a wise and unworldly man who had discarded intellectual and personal vanity. . . . The door of his mind always remained open to the ideas and speculations of the young. . . . I still looked on him as such an eminent and almost legendary figure that it was puzzling to imagine oneself with him in any ordinary human relationship . . . and I could only approach him agape with veneration.

Since Hardy was secure in his own achievement and had no need to play the great

man, he was surprisingly approachable and convivial—"the nearest thing to Shakespeare I should ever go for a walk with." (Graves noted that Hardy, a true countryman, could urinate on the march.) Hardy had no children of his own and fully reciprocated the friendship. He told John Masefield that he found Sassoon "a wonderful pleasure and delight" and "loved [him] like a son."

Picking up the word "wizard" from his *Diary*, Sassoon also paid tribute to Hardy in "Max Gate," a deceptively simple poem written after Hardy's death. In the first stanza, "Mr. Hardy," the tranquil public man, accompanied by his faithful dog "Wessex," is contrasted to the poet and wizard, whom he carefully suppresses when visitors arrive:

Old Mr. Hardy, upright in his chair,
Courteous to visiting acquaintance chatted
With unaloof alertness while he patted
The sheep dog whose society he preferred.
He wore an air of never having heard
That there was much that needed putting
right.
Hardy, the Wessex wizard, wasn't there.
Good care was taken to keep him out of
sight.

In the second stanza—which alludes to Hardy's "When I set out for Lyonesse," "Nor did the wisest wizard guess/ What would bechance at Lyonesse/ While I should sojourn there"—the reflective, private, poet-wizard-seer (plain "Hardy") suddenly surfaces when he's alone with Sassoon and mysteriously replaces the apparently ordinary man:

Head propped on hand, he sat with me alone,
Silent, the log fire flickering on his face.
Here was the seer whose words the world
had known.
Someone had taken Mr. Hardy's place.

As he explained in *Siegfried's Journey*: "When he gazed down at 'Wessie' he ceased to be Merlin. The face of the wizard became suffused with gentle compassion for all living

creatures whom he longed to defend against the chanceful injustice and calamity of earthly existence."

A potentially disruptive homosexual undercurrent swirled beneath the surface, but did not rise to disturb the tranquility of their friendship. Sassoon and T. E. Lawrence, as well as D. H. Lawrence (who did not know Hardy personally but wrote perceptively about him) were all struggling with a repressed homosexuality. Sassoon noted that the Hardys would be "horrificed if they knew of it." Blunden's biographer described the curious interaction of these characters in 1923: "Hardy holding forth on literature and war; Sassoon with his gaze fixed on Lawrence; Lawrence fascinated by Edmund; Edmund transfixed by Hardy." Each of the warriors competed to be the well-beloved.

In the first stanza of the apparently unpublished "Catafalque," Sassoon satirized the exploitation of Hardy's death by the press and by the ecclesiastics who buried the great skeptic in Westminster Abbey:

Thomas Hardy is dead.
Panegyrics have been piled upon his head.
"The Last Great Victorian"—
Fleet Street re-echoed, unctuous and
stentorian
"In the Abbey let him rest."
(His wishes were well known, but we know
best.)
This has been done
To the satisfaction of almost everyone.

T. E. Lawrence, writing to the artist William Rothenstein from an RAF base near Karachi, agreed with Sassoon about the pompous and ludicrously inappropriate ceremony:

I regret Hardy's funeral service. Mrs. [Bernard] Shaw sent me a copy. So little of it suited the old man's nature. He would have smiled, tolerantly, at it all: but I grow indignant for him, knowing that these sleek Deans and Canons were acting a lie behind his name. Hardy was too great to be suffered as an enemy of their faith: so he must be redeemed.

Lawrence, who recalled that Hardy was twelve when the Duke of Wellington died, was a careful student of the Napoleonic Wars and a great admirer of *The Dynasts*. He included five works by Hardy in his anthology of favorite short poems, *Minorities*. Lawrence had been introduced to Hardy by Graves when posted to a Tank Corps base in Wool, Dorset, in 1923. He would turn up for tea at Max Gate on Sunday afternoons, wearing his private's uniform and riding a powerful motorcycle—he would die in a motorcycle accident in 1935.

Lawrence got on well with older women and formed a close friendship with Thomas and Florence Hardy, just as he had with Bernard and Charlotte Shaw. In August 1923 he diffidently asked Florence whether Hardy would be willing to sign copies of his books: "If Mr. Hardy does such things, would he inscribe me copies of his thin-paper *Poems & Dynasts*. I have them & could bring them across. I know it's a vulgar desire; but I live in vulgar company: and they would be very precious possessions." Lawrence had seen many young men killed in the war, had himself survived serious wounds and, like Sassoon, was fascinated by Hardy's extraordinary old age. Writing to Graves the following month, he contrasted the squalor of his barracks with the ease of Max Gate and described Hardy as "so pale, so quiet, so refined into an essence. . . . There is an unbelievable dignity and ripeness about Hardy: he is waiting so tranquilly for death." In contrast to the young warriors who worshipped him, Hardy "feels interest in everyone, and veneration for no-one. I've not found in him any bowing-down, moral or material or spiritual." Using the same word as Sassoon to describe his relationship with Hardy, Lawrence told Graves that it "is so precious that I grudge writing about it."

In June 1926 Lawrence wrote Mrs. Hardy that he "would have liked a documented, intimate study of [Hardy's exemplary] old age, since its reality would be worth a great deal to everyone old, or growing old." Two years later, the over-scrupulous Lawrence,

though always a welcome guest, told her that he constantly had to overcome doubts about imposing on the hospitality of the almost other-worldly Hardy: "Each time I left Max Gate . . . I used to blame myself for intruding upon a presence which had done with things like me and mine. I would half-determine not to trouble his peace again. But as you know I always came back the next chance I had. I think I'd have tried to come even if you had not been good to me: while you were very good: and T. H." After the poet's death Lawrence (with a certain mock-modesty) wrote Rothenstein: "I was a sudden loser when Hardy went. Not that I could be a friend of his: the difference in size and age and performance between us was too overwhelming."

Like many Englishmen of his time and class, Lawrence had great difficulty expressing emotion. But his letter to Mrs. Hardy, written from Karachi in January 1927 and describing their final parting before he sailed to India in November 1926, was deeply moving. Lawrence suggested, but did not state, that both he and Hardy knew they would never see each other again, and that he sped away on his motorcycle because he could not bear their final farewell: "The afternoon was raw and miserable, like the day, and when T. H. turned back into the house to get a shawl (as I guessed) instantly I ran the bicycle out into the road and away, so that no possible reproach might lie against me for having helped him into danger of a chill." Again writing about himself in the third person, Hardy made his own approaching death the covert motif of his poignant description of their last moments together:

His friend Colonel T. E. Lawrence called to say good-bye before starting for India. Hardy was much affected by this parting, as T. E. Lawrence was one of his most valued friends. He went into the little porch and stood at the

front door to see the departure of Lawrence on his motor-bicycle. This machine was difficult to start, and, thinking he might have to wait some time Hardy turned into the house to fetch a shawl to wrap round him. In the meantime, fearing that Hardy might take a chill, Lawrence started the motor-bicycle and hurried away. Returning a few moments after, Hardy was grieved that he had not seen the actual departure, and said that he had particularly wished to see Lawrence go.

In March 1928, shortly after Hardy's death, Mrs. Hardy wrote Lawrence that he had strengthened Hardy's hold on life: "He was devoted to you. Somehow I think he might have lived had you been here. . . . You seem nearer to him, somehow, than anyone else, certainly more akin."

Hardy's traditional style and form—unlike the free-verse experimental poetry of Eliot and Pound—appealed deeply to these war poets. When the fabric of European civilization seemed irreparably damaged, his love for and knowledge of pre-industrial, rural society encouraged them to look back to the prewar world for the continuity of culture. Graves would go on to write historical novels and poetry on classical themes, and spend most of his years in a remote village in Spain; Sassoon celebrated the beauty and sporting life of the Kentish countryside; and Lawrence, in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, left a lasting memorial to the wild desert tribes of Arabia. Unlike the aesthetic Eliot and Pound—who concentrated on the symbolic, mythic and religious—or the popular patriotic and jingoistic English poets, Hardy was able to understand their war experience. They were alienated from the older generation who'd sent them into combat, but Hardy's dark vision enabled them to hold on to the redeeming power of poetry and "shake off misery." In this way, he created a precious bond with the traumatized and psychologically frail warriors.

New poems *by Adam Kirsch*

Winner of The New Criterion Poetry Prize for 2001

The patient lookers

Praise to the patient lookers: they
Who find the repetitious play
Of sunlight on a bale of hay

Enough of being to amaze,
To fix the self-forgetting gaze
That makes of pure attention praise:

They are rewarded here below.
Others, unsuited for the slow
Unfolding of that kingly show,

Bypass seductions of detail;
Their vision, rapid, prying, pale,
Urges the tearing of the veil,

Sure that behind a gorgeous screen
The substances of things unseen
Are trying to tell us what they mean,

In characters the whole world tall.
These pity; for the message shall
Come clear elsewhere, or not at all.

Indecision

What more on a summer afternoon
 Could I require?
Light without heat, my work-week done,
 A free desire,

And the world from my balcony composed
 Like a Renaissance
Picture, the elements disposed
 With significance

Too obvious to miss: the trees
 Are Nature's beauty;
My notebook the imperious
 Summons to Duty.

Neither could Lust's abrupt demands
 Have been omitted:
A sunbathing girl on the next roof stands,
 My gaze permitted

As though she did not notice it; and last
 The stereo
Is playing Mozart's movements, fast
 Then aching-slow,

A sign for the already adequate
 Engrossing Past.
Everything's given, though I know it
 Cannot last—

What one impetuous faculty
 Would quickly choose
The others as necessarily
 Loudly refuse.

The Body turns to her, the Soul's at rest
 In sexless nature;
Ambition writes, but Conscience knows the best
 Is done, and culture.

And so the day goes by. Is life
Thus to be wasted,
Force spent in an internal strife
And nothing tasted?

Our fate is not to be the sum
Of all these joys,
But to offer them a medium
And counterpoise.

42 up

The girl who knew at twenty-one
She was too strong and pure for marriage
Is pregnant, and hoping for a son
To join the girl in the baby-carriage;

The seven-year-old who in the drab
East End dreamed of the jockey's speed
Is happy to drive a taxicab
Now that he has six mouths to feed;

And of course the boy at the public school,
Born to an ancient name and grand,
Remained a simpering heartless fool
And became a solicitor, as he planned.

Some find that they cannot fight free
Of the usual domestic messes,
Some put on quiet misery
Thoughtlessly every day, like glasses;

And the last, most cherished mystery,
How I have grown to what I am,
Is stripped in the documentary
To the logic of a diagram:

Urge endowed by the mindless gene
Colliding with hopeless circumstance
Is all our various lives have been,
Mathematical, immune to chance.

Yet each of them, staring from the screen
And whispering "You are one of us,"
Defies me to say that what I've seen
Makes life any less mysterious.

Waking

Waking, he finds his arm
Still sore from having pressed
Her unresisting form
Tightly below the breast.

(Something said in a dream
Unconscious made him fear
She would not stay the same
For long, or lie so near.)

As though he could seize the breaths
Escaping her one by one!
Instinct clings to the sheath
Of the flame already gone.

Stoppard's "Utopia"

by Mark Steyn

In the London theatre, unlike New York, there is no "season": a hot ticket is as likely to open in July as November. And so it is that, on a gorgeous English August day (53° and drizzling), while Broadway is slumbering out in the Hamptons, le tout Londres is packed into the National Theatre for *The Coast of Utopia*, the new trilogy by Tom Stoppard: three plays, each over three hours, played with intermissions in a twelve-hour marathon, an evening out that takes up all the afternoon and much of the morning too, and offers little more physical discomfort than, say, flying coach to New Zealand. The question on the theatergoing class's lips is: Why would Sir Tom do this to us?

I suspect the answer is: Because he can. When he wrote his first hit back in the Sixties, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard was admirably straightforward. Asked by someone, "What's it about?" he replied, "It's about to make me extremely rich." And so it did, since when he's led a charmed life of Olivier Awards and Oscars and knighthoods. On Broadway, Stoppard has been a reliable supplier of the so-called "snob hit"—the Brit import that catches the fancy of the local audience—in part because he's brainy without being pompous. This is a rarer combination than one might expect. A few years ago, Harold Pinter mounted an absurd campaign to get one of the few West End theatres not named for a specific personage—the Comedy Theatre—re-named in his own honor. Stoppard denies advising

Pinter that it might be simpler to get himself renamed "Harold Comedy." But, true or not, the anecdote is Stoppardian in character, for he has always enjoyed frolicking on the intersection between the intellectual life and the human comedy. Early on in *The Coast of Utopia*, we're in Russia, 1833, and Mikhail Bakunin has returned from abroad to his family's country estate, his head filled with Schelling and Fichte and the other dizzying philosophies he's picked up on his travels. The only reality that matters, he declares, lies in the interconnection of the human spirit with the abstract essence of the universe. "The outer world of material existence is mere illusion," he proclaims. Then: "God, I'm starving."

This is an excellent and efficient joke, and enjoyed most heartily by the London audience. It also neatly distills the Stoppard formula for exploring great ideas. A formula for exploring ideas may be oxymoronic, but it's worked a treat for this playwright. Four decades on and at four times the length, Stoppard is still operating on the strategy that worked so well in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*: the obscure corner of the big picture. *The Coast of Utopia* is "about" a group of nineteenth-century Russian radicals who wandered across the continent planting the theories that, to one degree or another, would seduce the world for the next century and a half. They're not the household names: Karl Marx shows up, but only as a cameo. Rather, Stoppard is

concerned with more dimly remembered figures of the period: Bakunin, Vissarion Belinsky, Alexander Herzen, the footnotes of history, men who roamed the map from St. Petersburg to London and had a knack for being in the right place at the right time, turning up in Paris just in time for the 1848 revolt, etc. Whatever its other defects, the long, stifling reign of Nicholas I produced exceptional talents, including the first great flowering of Russian literature (Pushkin, Gogol) and Russian music (Glinka, Balakirev). But those accomplishments pale alongside the baleful influences of Bakunin, Herzen, and others. They set in motion the ideological fuse to 1917 and thereby determined the shape of the twentieth century, as a clash between the Anglo-American liberal state and an alternative that should have been laughed out of court. The presence of former and not so former Communists in the governments of western Europe reminds us that even today the argument has not been decisively settled.

It was Thomas More who coined the word "Utopia," from the Greek: "ou"—not or no—and "topos"—place. In other words, no place. No such place. It's an illusion, and to pursue it will at best distract you from the world you're actually in, and at worst destroy that world. There's no No-place like home, and never can be. More made Utopia an island, unlike almost any of the European states then in existence, understanding that Utopianism is a journey—to travel hopefully, even if one always washes up on some unforeseen set of rocks. The individual titles of Stoppard's trilogy map the trajectory at its most optimistic: first, *Voyage*; then, *Shipwreck*; finally, *Salvage*. It is the arc on which the playwright's own homeland, the Czech Republic, is embarked, currently poised somewhere early in the third act.

It is also, as it happens, a pithy summation of the author's own life: Sir Tom today speaks in the unaccented accent that gives one away instantly, his English so exquisitely cultured he couldn't possibly be a

native. He was born Tomas Straussler, a Czech Jew. All four of his grandparents were murdered in the Holocaust. The infant Straussler was hurried away on a boat to Singapore, then India. His father died when his ship was blown up en route to join his family. Straussler came to England, wound up at a minor public school (Pocklington), where he took to cricket and little else. Then, journalism, the theatre, and the transformation of Tomas Straussler, Mitteleuropean Jew, into Tom Stoppard, knight of the realm and, at one point, the lucky armpiece of Britain's most beloved sitcom heroine. In American terms, it's as if Kurt Weill had wound up dating Mary Tyler Moore. From the moment young Tomas landed in Singapore, the British Empire has been if not Utopia, then at the very least Eutopos—Thomas More's "good place," though few of Stoppard's theatrical contemporaries would entertain the notion.

While it would be unfair to expect *The Coast of Utopia* to map the author's own voyage, you spot that the nearest thing to a protagonist is a man who makes approximately the same journey: Alexander Herzen, aristocratic revolutionary, skeptical utopian and, in his way, one of the greatest influences on the modern world. We meet him first as a young man in his native land: *Voyage*, the first play and the only one in the trilogy likely to work as a stand-alone piece, is set in Moscow and the Bakunin estates in the 1830s, and suffused in self-consciously Chekhovian mannerisms (wistful pining for Moscow, etc). In *Shipwreck*, the second play, Herzen is in France, a witness to the failed revolutions of 1848. In *Salvage*, the third, he is an old man in London, finding in the image of summer lightning his own variation on Voltaire's injunction to tend our gardens. Like Stoppard, he has journeyed from the ideological world, the cauldron of all the great "isms"—socialism, Communism, anarchism—to the British world, where they muddle along without. The trilogy is bursting with people full of urgent certainty on how we should live—Marx,

Trotsky, the critic Belinsky, the slavophile Aksakov, over seventy characters offering something for all tastes, even (about nine or ten hours in) anglospherist notions of liberty.

More than the ideas themselves, the real legacy of Herzen and his friends is the concept of the power of ideas, their principal contribution being a new word in the dictionary: “intelligentsia”—“the intellectual opposition considered as a social force.” This had never been a great factor in European history—which embittered prince overthrew which careless king generally had little to do with intellectual philosophy—nor could the intelligentsia be said to have been a significant force in, say, the American revolution, which is at least part of the reason why it worked. Even in our own time, the Age of Ideology, the battle of political philosophies goes hand in hand with accidents of history and quirks of personality: if you’re rummaging around “root causes” for the present state of the Muslim world, you can trace at least some of it back to September 30, 1920 when King Alexander of Greece took a stroll in the grounds of his palace and was fatally bitten by a monkey. Pondering the return to the throne of Constantine I and the Greco-Turkish war that followed, Churchill said, “It is perhaps no exaggeration to remark that a quarter of a million persons died of this monkey’s bite.” Nonetheless, Herzen and his generation were the first to devote their lives to the quest for the all-encompassing “ism” that still obsesses much of the world today. If you’re going to wallow in an all-day trilogy, this is a subject worth the time and trouble.

A friend of mine who co-wrote a play Trevor Nunn directed says that his idea of hell is a first-rehearsal context-setting opening speech by the great man. Even for, say, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or *Oklahoma!*, their time and place specific and contained, Sir Trevor can spin it out for most of the day. The first rehearsal speech for *The Coast of Utopia* must have gone on for weeks, as

Nunn fleshed out the historical context for a work that often seems little more than historical context. In the end, he directs the event as a grand cavalcade, history’s passing parade, with the second play—the 1848 revolutions—virtually Nunn’s homage to his own production of *Les Misérables*—sort of *Les Miz* without the songs, which some churlish souls may regard as an improvement. After a great start in Play One, Act One, Scene One, William Dudley’s designs fall back on a lot of computer-generated land-, sea- and cityscapes that are meant to look state-of-the-art but are more evocative of 1980s video games than nineteenth-century history. Along with the eternally revolving stage—if you miss the 1848 revolution, there’ll be another along in a minute—they give the production a faintly cheesy air.

Not even the National can afford a company of seventy, and so a thirty-eight-strong cast grapples to put faces to the swirling tide of history, not always successfully: there were a couple of moments when it took me a while to realize this or that actor had switched characters. Even those who get to live a little longer with their roles don’t always inhabit them. As Herzen, Stephen Dillane seems to have been misled by the shorthand—“aristocrat” does not imply something quite as delicate, elegiac, and inert in Russia as it does in England. There is an immense lack of the primal force—both physical and intellectual—that Herzen was to almost all who met him. Karl Marx, in Stoppard’s hands, can already see “the Neva lit by flames and running red, the coconut palms hung with corpses all along the shining strand from Kronstadt to the Nevsky Prospekt.” This is an extraordinary speech for a British post-war dramatist. For most of the Cold War, Sir Tom’s chum Pinter insisted there was an equivalence of evil between America and the Soviet Union. Even after the fall of the USSR, the most you could wring from these fellows was a concession that Russian Communism hadn’t worked out in practice, but real authentic Marxism had never been tried. Stoppard

sees the violence as inherent, present at the birth. But the point is undermined by the presentation of Marx as a stage ogre, visibly repellent to those around him. Perhaps this is Trevor Nunn's way of subverting his author, but, either way, it seems inadequate to the occasion. Whether you think, as many London critics still do, that he had a unique understanding of human nature or whether you ascribe to his bloody escurcheon more violent deaths than any other individual in modern history, the Marx we're shown here is too crude and too ugly. Lesser figures are equally woozy, even in the hands of Nunn's most accomplished actors. For good or ill, the director has been unable to work any of his sleight of hand on the piece. It stands or falls on whether you're as engaged as Stoppard in the milieu and its long echoes down the decades.

Just as *Les Miz* struck a chord with Eastern European audiences in the 1980s—with the tattered French tricolor replaced by the Solidarity flag for the Gdansk production—so *The Coast of Utopia* feels as if it's addressing the world we live in now. It's just that no one agrees quite what it's trying to tell us. A Tory backbencher, Paul Goodman, Member of Parliament for Wycombe, claims the whole thing's an indictment of Tony Blair's assault on British traditions and pragmatism: when Herzen arrives in England, he discovers that there's no system to overthrow. Key line: "There's no system to anything—everything's just left to grow tangled together." But Blair in his contempt for the past—his demolition of the House of Lords, his willingness to abandon the pound, etc.—represents a profound rejection of this tradition.

Not a bit of it, says *The Guardian*. The trilogy is, in fact, a paean to Blairite gradualism and reform over revolutionary utopianism. Most other critics dither somewhere in between, anxious to hail Sir Tom for the dazzling way he "plays with ideas" without ever making it clear quite what ideas it is he's playing with. He plays with them in his usual way: when a utilitarian

argues that a book on hemorrhoids has more value than a book by Pushkin, the elegant Ivan Turgenev wittily ripostes that it is when one is reading Pushkin that one forgets one's hemorrhoids. If this is the test, it would be interesting to apply it to audiences at the end of the Stoppathon after spending twelve hours in the buttock-inflaming seats of the National's Lyttelton Theatre. In America, one notes, the intelligentsia may be charlatans, but the Preparation H works. Indeed, the choice is a false one. The Tsar's empire is, in the words Stoppard gives the philosopher Pyotr Chaadayeve, "the Caliban of Europe." Even the artifacts most associated with Russian society—the samovar—were invented elsewhere. Stoppard is a terrific researcher and, when he alights on a telling fact, he knows how to enlarge it: A society which doesn't produce original goods is unlikely to produce original ideas. The Enlightenment? The Renaissance? Didn't happen here, won't happen, couldn't happen. Even the one great ideology for which Russia became famous was invented by a German in the Reading Room of the British Museum: as I mentioned in *The New Criterion*'s "Survival of Culture" series, not only do all the great ideas come from the West but so do all the anti-Western ideas.

So I, at least, was struck by the topicality of this section: after all, who's the Caliban of the modern world? The region that missed out on the Enlightenment? That produces no products one would find in the average household? But, as a man who famously "plays with ideas," Stoppard has already flitted on to the next one. Even the gags seem to be written with an eye to the next edition of Bartlett's—"Literary criticism is a job for people whose second book didn't live up to expectations"—rather than to illuminate character or theme.

The "Caliban of Europe" is an interesting phrase: it captures precisely the appeal of a backward society to the ambitious intellectual. It is a playground in a way that settled, evolving, civilized states can never be. Stoppard understands the excitement that

ideas hold for Bakunin and Herzen, and he's enough of a showman to toss in among the drier philosophies the concept of "free love" as a justification for chronicling how good the great thinkers are at nailing broads. But it's very hard to keep track even of the big names. Some Russian fellow ambles urbanely to his end. The busy cyclorama, doing a CNN crawl through history at the back of the stage, lets us know it's 1837. If you stop and think, you might pull up Pushkin from the mental rolodex: Didn't he die in a duel with some guy? Must have been around eighteenthirty-something? But as the words and images and rotating players are flying past you, an awful lot gets lost. Stoppard has fulfilled his own itinerary: his trilogy sets sail on a vast sea and is drowned by the sheer scale of the subject. In the end, *The Coast of Utopia* must be counted a valiant failure.

Perhaps Stoppard is too assimilated, too English. His stage act these many years seems designed to anticipate the British suspicion of ideas, of "cleverness." What better defence for a brainbox than to "play" with ideas, toss them around, use them for sport, amusement, nothing more? Nothing wrong with this approach: If only the great Continental ideologues of the nineteenth century had been equally saucy, equally playful, we would have been spared the largest mound of corpses in history. The English refusal to take anything seriously is not without its merits: to Sir Thomas More, Utopia was an obvious folly; it took

Continentalists to take up the idea for real. And so it is that the most profound moments on the arid *Coast of Utopia* are when individual passion and humanity spill across its shores. At the end of the second play, *Shipwreck*, Alexander Herzen is alone. His wife is dead, his mother lost at sea, and with her Herzen's son Kolya. Yet he refuses to be consoled for the death of his child. "His life," he says, "was what it was. Because children grow up, we think a child's purpose is to grow up. But a child's purpose is to be a child. Nature doesn't disdain what lives only for a day. It pours the whole of itself into each moment. We don't value the lily less for not being made of flint and built to last. Life's bounty is in its flow, later is too late."

Any parent cursed to outlive a child will understand Herzen's words, even as we appreciate the flaw in the argument—the death of a son is the loss of unrealized potential; there is no such tragedy built into the brief life of a lily. Yet the event transforms Herzen, the notion that "later is too late" outweighing all the decades of study and argument, the belated understanding that it is ludicrous to elevate an unknown theoretical future over the moment in all its imperfections. As telling as the argument is where Herzen makes it: he's on a cross-Channel steamer, bound for England. The six-year plans molder in forgotten Moscow filing cabinets, the thousand-year Reich is dust, but there is always England, eternally muddling through without a system.

Summer at the MET

by Karen Wilkin

Anyone who thought that the Metropolitan Museum's tandem summer offerings, "Gauguin In New York Collections: The Lure of the Exotic" and "The Age of Impressionism: European Painting from the Ordrupgaard Collection, Copenhagen,"¹ would be crowd-pleasing confections for the vacation season had, as they say, another think coming. Both shows could be enjoyed simply as slightly random accumulations of sometimes wonderful, sometimes familiar works, but both turned out to include some real surprises, to raise interesting questions about the nature of collecting, the difference between American and European taste, and even, in a couple of instances, to make you reconsider your preconceptions about a

couple of artists. Not bad for light, hot-weather fare.

The waves of tropical heat this summer, in fact, provided an unexpectedly apt context for the Gauguin show. The sultry, superheated palette and languid imagery of the exhibition's best known Tahitian paintings took on new resonance when you came upon them straight from a steamy New York street. The indolent women in *The Siesta* (probably 1891–92, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Annenberg Collection) or the terrified, prone teenager of *Manao Tupapau (Spirit of the Dead Watching)* (1892, Albright-Knox Gallery) made a new kind of sense when your own body retained a recent memory of moving through stifling heat. But that's mere anecdote. What was really exciting about the exhibition was its comprehensiveness. Although drawn exclusively from public and private collections throughout New York State, including the Met's own substantial holdings of the artist's work, "The Lure of the Exotic" provided a remarkably complete overview not only of Gauguin's evolution as an artist, but also of his restless exploration of an apparently infinite spectrum of mediums and disciplines.

The selections included such textbook works as the Met's seductive half-length *Two Tahitian Women* (1899), all golden bodies and enchained ample arms, offering flowers, and MOMA's monumental *Hina Tefatou (The Moon and the Earth)* (1893), that dusky

1 "Gauguin In New York Collections: The Lure of the Exotic" opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York on June 18 and remains on view until October 20, 2002.

"The Age of Impressionism: European Painting from the Ordrupgaard Collection, Copenhagen" opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York on June 18 and remains on view until September 8, 2002. The exhibition will also be seen at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas (October 6, 2002–January 5, 2003). It was previously on view at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland (February 17–May 26, 2002).

Catalogues for both exhibitions have been published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press (*Gauguin*: 256 pages, \$39.95; *Impressionism*: 295 pages, \$29.95).

ochre Amazon, flattened against a weirdly symbolic landscape. The earlier part of Gauguin's career was accounted for by such well-known images as the Albright-Knox's Breton crucifixion *Yellow Christ* (1889) and MOMA's *Still Life With Three Puppies* (1888). But the show was also rich in unexpected and seldom-seen works: from the Met, Gauguin's accomplished 1877–78 marble portrait of his son Emil as a child, and, from private sources, a stunning range of portraits spanning the entire arc of the artist's development, still lifes painted at critical moments, and an 1887 Martinique landscape that neatly summed up his connections with the Impressionists and anticipated his distinctive vision of the South Seas. A wonderful selection of the painter's cranky, faux-primitive wood carvings and woodcut prints, his quirky ceramics, luminous watercolors, and assured drawings forced even the most casual summer visitor to consider Gauguin whole. The drawings and watercolors (some of them studies for celebrated pictures not included in the show because of its geographic limitations) allowed you to see the painter at his most intimate, in rapid, direct notations that were strikingly more fluid and particular than the carefully stilled, more generalized images of his best known paintings.

If the title "The Lure of the Exotic" raised fears that the show would be an exercise in what a colleague of mine calls "the Van Gogh's ear school of art history"—which emphasizes sensational biographical details at the expense of aesthetic and historical considerations—that anxiety, too, proved misplaced. But there was reason to worry. While less familiar than the saga of the tortured Dutchman with whom he briefly shared a house in Arles, Gauguin's history can easily be presented in similarly cinematic terms. It's even possible to put a multicultural spin on it for today's market: hot-blooded, part-Spanish French ex-stockbroker flees bourgeois life with Danish wife and children to become an Artist (upper-case A), spends explosive interlude in South

of France with unstable Dutch painter, then settles in Tahiti to paint radically modern images of nubile maidens in sarongs, dies in the South Seas, misunderstood and insufficiently acclaimed.

Like all such oversimplifications, however, there is some truth to this version of the story. That Gauguin's life was marked from his earliest childhood on by restless changes of place and later by dramatic changes of career, that his background and upbringing were less than conventional, and that, once established as an artist, he chose to present himself as an uncouth outsider, even by the flexible standards of the French *fin de siècle* vanguard, are verifiable facts. It's also true that, as one of the show's curators, Colta Ives, points out in an excellent essay on the painter's travels, "the 'coarse sailor' of Gauguin's self-characterization was not only hugely intelligent but also well read, well traveled, and well versed in the history of art."

Yet Gauguin's notion of himself as a rough type outside the pale of convention was not wholly inaccurate. His maturity as a painter was bound up with a series of deliberately sought, crucial encounters with art, stimuli, and places that were antithetical to the inherited Greco-Roman tradition of Western culture. (No, this does not make him a postmodern globalist *avant la lettre*.) All of which means that the title "The Lure of the Exotic" was not simply an attention-grabbing ploy. By tracing Gauguin's preconceived ideas about "the Other," underlining his interest in non-classical art, and tracking his evolving responses to a series of distinctive landscapes and their distinctive inhabitants, the curators were able to establish relationships among a remarkably diverse group of works and, at the same time, to illuminate the painter's achievement.

The connecting thread between the wide-ranging selections was Gauguin's continuing quest for places that jump-started his powers of invention. Special characteristics of light and landscape, "primitive" qualities, and abundant color, both literal and figurative, were prerequisites, along

with an extremely low cost of living. Gauguin's steadily intensifying and, as it turned out, vain search for the Edenic, the unspoiled, and the economical took him to the rugged northern coast of France, sun-struck Provence, and tropical islands in the Caribbean and the South Seas—to the Breton artists' retreats of Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu, to Arles with Van Gogh, and finally to Tahiti and the Marquesas.

Unlike Braque, who after a certain amount of time working rapturously in the South of France noted that he was no longer dependent on the specifics of place—"I carried my light with me," he remarked—Gauguin seems to have required actual encounters with the real thing (or, occasionally, a photograph) to spur his imagination. Yet he always insisted that working from memory, rather than from direct observation, produced the most powerful images. He believed implicitly in the beneficial effect of painting not from the motif, but from the motif transformed by having been fully internalized and assimilated. Memory turned the accidental and the particular into simplified evocations of experience more intense than any literal description based on perception. The exhibition's splendid watercolors and drawings allowed you to follow this process, from acutely observed notations to the beginnings of their transformation into archetypal, timeless symbols.

Not just any remembered actuality could provoke resonant images, however. For Gauguin, the original stimulus seems to have had to correspond, in some way, to his ideal of a "primitive," "savage," more authentic approach to life, hence the Breton and Provençal peasant women in starched coifs and the sturdy Polynesian *rahines* in pareus and Mother Hubbards, not elegant Parisians in fashionable clothes and Renaissance-inspired Venuses; the rugged cliffs of Brittany and the lush, big-leafed vegetation of the tropics, not the flat fields and silvery shrubbery of the Isle de France. Yet none of the places Gauguin traveled to in his hunt for untouched exotica—including Polyne-

sia—had escaped the influence of modernity and colonization. The golden brown, bare breasted goddesses of his South Seas paintings exist only on canvas; missionaries had covered their sculptural bodies with shapeless Mother Hubbards and the indigenous culture of the islands had long since eroded. The paradisaical life described by the painter in his journal, *Noa Noa*, proves to be largely fiction, like the earlier writings about the South Pacific by his compatriot Pierre Loti, which (among other idealized accounts) apparently helped to inspire Gauguin's desire to move to Polynesia; an assiduous scholar has found the painter's grocery bills; canned goods rather than fruit off the tree were the staples of his diet.

Did it matter? Throughout his peregrinations, Gauguin seems to have encountered enough of the "primitive," the "savage," and the exotic to satisfy his longings and feed his fantasies. Anthropological and ethnographic correctness are plainly not the issue in his work, but rather an idea—or an ideal—of a terrestrial paradise. Even though Gauguin's first trip to Tahiti was partly funded as a project to record indigenous culture, that is not why he chose to exclude most evidence of European presence from his Polynesian pictures. He was equally cavalier in his choice of exotic inclusions; most of the "idols" and artifacts woven into his paintings are based not on Tahitian prototypes, but on examples from elsewhere, including other Pacific islands, Southeast Asia, Japan, and even Egypt. It's evident too, that the stylized forms and planes of Gauguin's compositions, the unmodulated, clearly bounded zones of his color, and the eloquent, frontal postures of his figures owe less to his observation of Polynesian (or Breton or Provençal) actuality than they do to his sophisticated understanding of other art. But it was "other art" of a particular kind. Gauguin rejected academic standards of idealized, classical beauty, preferring to look to Asia, Egypt, and the Middle Ages for inspiration, or to the "transgressive" artists of both his own

time and slightly earlier generations—a series of eclectic sources that might be described simply as another kind of exotica.

One of the great pleasures of “The Lure of the Exotic” (touched upon, too, in Ives’s essays) was the revelation of Gauguin’s connections to his chosen ancestors. His interest in Japanese prints (and sometimes in medieval art) was manifest in the early Breton pictures, with their aggressive croppings, flattened spaces, and heated color. A challenge to Edouard Manet was offered by *Spirit of the Dead Watching*; the wide-eyed, prostrate brown nude, with her spectral attendant, is an intensely serious parody of the pale, frontal nudity of *Olympia*, with her sparring gaze, and her black servant. Gauguin’s life-long admiration for Cézanne was demonstrated in picture after picture, evidence of a continuing effort to conjure up weight and mass with patches of color and to suggest powerful dramas by setting massive forms side by side, as the Aix master did. A series of hefty Tahitian nudes, backs turned to the viewer and upraised arms, recalled Courbet’s fleshy bathers, similarly with arms lifted, seen from the back against pools of water. Egyptian sculptures haunted the poses of still other Tahitian images. And so on.

If the selections in “The Lure of the Exotic” pointed backwards to the multiple sources of Gauguin’s approach, they also signaled ahead, to younger innovators who found confirmation for their own explorations in his brilliant color and eloquent simplifications. These later generations of artists also seem to have responded to his vision of a vernacular Eden, a terrestrial paradise synthesized from observation and preconception, filtered through memory and an understanding of the adventurous art of the recent past. The dream of Arcadia is, of course, one of the great traditional themes, yet the heightened color, the clarity of shape, and even the bold patterning of Matisse’s most daring pictures can be read as implied by Gauguin’s Polynesian pictures; certainly the two men shared a taste for exotic female subjects, pastoral idylls, and sinuously

figured fabrics. Matisse’s pivotal *Bonheur de vivre* (1905–06, The Barnes Foundation) might not have been possible without Gauguin’s precedent. Bonnard owed a great deal to Gauguin and so, possibly, does Frank Stella, from his Indian Bird series on. I admit that the last is a stretch, but there’s no doubt about Matisse’s connection with Gauguin. One of the high points of the Met’s show is a vigorous 1891 portrait of a young Tahitian in a pink shirt, a flower tucked fetchingly behind his ear, from a private collection. This elegant, deceptively simple exercise in expressive masses and delicious color used to belong to Matisse.

The catalogue that accompanied the Gauguin show includes an informative essay by Susan Alyson Stein, tracing the history of the painter’s reception in New York, from reports of works seen at Gertrude and Leo Stein’s apartment on the rue de Fleurus, to the arrival of actual examples, to the Armory Show and its aftermath. Stein’s thorough marshalling of fact is a little daunting, but the questions she raises about the history and evolution of taste in twentieth-century America are absorbing ones, made even more absorbing by the overlapping of “The Lure of the Exotic” with “The Age of Impressionism: European Paintings From Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen.” This exhibition was not, despite its title, a gathering of popular pictures designed to enhance museum admission revenues, but rather a survey of the vision and dedication of a single collector, the Danish insurance magnate and statesman Wilhelm Hansen. That Hansen concentrated largely on French modernist painting of the late nineteenth century meant that “The Age of Impressionism” did double duty as an excellent introduction to the Gauguin show and a summing up of the context in which he worked—which is not to say that the exhibition didn’t have ample rewards in isolation.

Hansen seems to have begun not as a collector, in the obsessive sense of the word, but simply as someone who acquired art for his Copenhagen home after his marriage.

His first purchases were conventional enough; he and his wife bought Romantic Danish paintings of the nineteenth century, from the so-called Golden Age, along with slightly more adventurous works by Danish contemporaries, including a former classmate of Hansen's. Yet the extant correspondence from Hansen's frequent business trips to Paris documents his avid visits to museums, salons, and galleries, his growing appetite for French modernist art, and his increasingly exacting eye. By 1915, it appears that he had decided to dedicate himself to French painting, which remained his chief direction until 1931, when he made his last purchase, a Degas pastel. The result: a refreshingly personal, idiosyncratic, but comprehensive group of works tracing a chronology from Ingres, Delacroix, and Courbet to Manet, Monet, and Gauguin, which he always hoped to have seen by the public. After Hansen's death in 1936, his wife fulfilled her husband's aspirations by giving the collection to the state; today it is housed in a small museum—the Ordrupgaard—in a town just north of Copenhagen.

Although Hansen seems to have been the driving force behind the collection, purchases were funded through a consortium that included two art dealers and another significant Scandinavian collector, an arrangement designed to allow them to buy *en bloc*, with an eye toward selling unwanted works to finance the acquisition of more desirable pieces. The consortium's ambition—and their prescience—is impressive. In addition to fine individual purchases, they bought from the sales of Degas's collections and his own work, following his death, and acquired a large number of works from Alfonse Kann's collection; they tried, but failed, to buy the extraordinary holdings of Auguste Pellerin, which included an astonishing number of superb Cézannes, from all periods.

The present collection, however, does not completely reflect these efforts, since a banking crisis necessitated the sale of some of the most important works originally assembled. When financial stability returned,

Hansen did his best to replace the losses, but by then prices had risen and fewer works of comparable excellence were available, so the damage was never completely repaired. Nonetheless, the Met's exhibition was full of remarkable things. A crusty, creamy Daubigny seascape set a new standard for the painter, more than holding its own with a much smaller, but no less intense Courbet of the much-painted cliffs near Etretat. A Sisley of a Bougival factory amid floodwaters, a classically geometric arrangement of blues, grays, and rosy tans, was similarly paradigmatic—perhaps not surprisingly since the picture belonged to Degas. A ravishing Morisot of a reclining woman in diaphanous white was another prime example of its author's abilities, at once declaring her special gifts and her debt to her friend Manet.

The sole Cézanne in the collection was a gem, the small, horizontal *Women Bathing* (c. 1895), with its paired clusters of massive figures, seen close up, locked into an eloquently inflected landscape. Hansen's Degas alone were almost worth a visit to the show. A stunning group of pastels spanned the artist's career, from an 1858 study for the celebrated group portrait of his Italian relatives, the Bellelli, to a series of urgent, rough late pastels of bathers and dancers; a ghostly oil of children in the yard of a New Orleans house was testimony to the painter's visit to his cotton-broker relatives in Louisiana. Other memorable oddball inclusions: an enchanting Delacroix lion, muscular Daumiers, and an awkward but prophetic early Manet of a young woman, at once an homage to Titian and a reinvention of figuration.

If individual paintings were noteworthy, the fact that they had been selected by European eyes made them even more interesting collectively, since Americans largely pioneered the in-depth acquisition of works by the artists in the Ordrupgaard Collection—which is why U.S. museums are so rich in Impressionist pictures. Spending time with Hansen's collection suggested

that a different sensibility had been at work in Copenhagen than in—say—Boston or Chicago or New York, although just what that difference was remained difficult to articulate. Hansen's pictures were mainly intimate, domestic in scale, despite his avowed public mission, but some of his more spectacular holdings—including a full length Manet portrait that had belonged to Degas—were among the “lost” works. What most seems to distinguish Hansen is his taste for broadly painted, light-suffused pictures. The collection is rich in early, solidly painted Corots—in contrast to the late, misty landscapes sought after by American collectors—and firm early Monets—in contrast to the shimmering chromatic improvisations of his middle years that fill our museums. (The collection does include Monet's loosely painted *Waterloo Bridge, Overcast* [1903] a muted gray-blue picture.) In some ways, Hansen's collection is close to that of the Clark Art Institute, which was assembled by a very European-

ized American and his French wife; the Clarks and Hansen shared a similar weakness for icky Renoirs.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Hansen collection is its Gauguins, a mini-retrospective that filled in some of the gaps in the Met's exhibition, from an early study of the artist's sleeping daughter to an iconic Polynesian *Adam and Eve*, painted the year before his death, in 1902. Hansen's strong group of Arles pictures made up for their scant representation in the New York show. A tough-minded 1896 portrait of the nine-year-old daughter of a prominent French resident of Tahiti was a standout, a kind of prefiguration of Matisse's portraits of his daughter Marguerite. If you kept shuttling between the two shows, you might have reached some conclusions about the difference between American and European taste. Or not. But you would have seen some wonderful things as you tried to answer the question.

Music

Great conductors

by Jay Nordlinger

It was a neat trick of history that the dawn of recordings coincided with the turn of the twentieth century. It was in 1902 that Caruso first sang into that horn. So when we speak of “the era of recordings,” we mean the twentieth century, and when we speak of the twentieth century, we mean those years in which recording—preservation, a kind of immortality—was possible.

Four years ago, the Philips label released *Great Pianists of the 20th Century*, a massive project, encompassing 100 “volumes,” 200 discs, and seventy-four different pianists. Of course, not all of these pianists were “great”—how could they have been, given that number?—but one’s definition had to be elastic. Philips showed us, with great care, the entire panorama of pianists in the twentieth century: all the ones who were lucky enough to get their stuff on vinyl, or whatever the material of the day.

Now it is the turn of conductors. IMG Artists recently launched *Great Conductors of the 20th Century*. Its first installment consisted of fifteen volumes; in all, they will produce sixty, which is to say sixty double-CD sets (120 discs) representing sixty different maestros. Can that many really qualify as “great”? No, but, again: elasticity. The collection, in the words of the company, “will be researched and packaged by IMG Artists, and marketed and distributed internationally by EMI Classics.” It took a huge amount of cooperation to deliver these goods; the recordings come from a

variety of labels, plus radio-broadcast archives, plus private collections. There seems to have been no “turf problem” here.

IMG’s aim is lofty, but realistic, and achieved. “The Great Conductors of the 20th Century series aims to present sound portraits of a wide range of great conductors and their art, who lived, worked, and died in the twentieth century. Through them, all the representative ‘schools’ of interpretation and style, amongst these the French, German, Italian and Russian schools, are explored.” The volumes are handsomely packaged, with superb historical and biographical notes, and wonderful, numerous photos.

And there is, of course, a great variety of music on these discs, chosen with obvious care. Every conductor’s strengths are played to—John Barbiroli would obviously be heard in Elgar (the *Enigma Variations*) and Mahler (the “Resurrection” Symphony)—and yet most are allowed a range of works, not pigeonholed. We also hear several pieces twice, or three times (or, as the collection grows, more): Haydn’s Symphony No. 92 from both Bruno Walter and Nicolai Malko; *La Valse* from Ernest Ansermet and André Cluytens. We hear virtually every possible temperament and approach.

The IMG coordinators are not snobbish, either. They give us music both high and low. We hear what Erich Kleiber can do in Mozart’s Symphony No. 40, but we also hear him in the “Du und Du” waltz of Johann Strauss. There are pieces long and

short, Classical and Modern, central and peripheral. With most of these conductors, we feel that we are given a fairly complete view—and a conductor ought to be complete. Not every conductor can bring off a Bruckner symphony and an Offenbach galop to perfect effect. But should he be expected to do so? Yes, if he is truly a great conductor.

IMG will complete its series—will dispense the sixtieth volume—in the autumn of 2004. The first fifteen feature a cross-section of conductors; some of them are well-known—their “legacies” long established—and some of them are barely known at all. This opening roster reads as follows: Karel Ančerl, Ansermet, Ataúlfo Argenta, Barbirolli, Fritz Busch, Cluytens, Ferenc Fricsay, Nikolai Golovanov, Kleiber (the father, Erich, not the son, Carlos—yet), Serge Koussevitsky, Malko, Igor Markevitch, Eugene Ormandy, Carl Schuricht, and Walter. We will take a look at five of the less exalted ones.

Each of us has a conductor or two whom we feel neglected by history—cheated out of a higher reputation. For many of us, one of those conductors is André Cluytens, Belgian-born but essentially (and by citizenship) French. He never had a truly first-rate podium of his own, but he made many outstanding recordings, including a famous one of the Fauré Requiem with Victoria de los Angeles and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (not included on the IMG discs, but available, as always, from EMI Classics). Robert Layton, who has written the liner notes for the Cluytens volume, reminds us that the conductor also made distinguished Beethoven albums, with the pianist Solomon (only one name, please, like the present Midori) and the violinist David Oistrakh. Layton also mentions that, when Cluytens’s commercial recording of the *Symphonie fantastique* came out, in 1957, the catalogue was “already crowded with versions by such distinguished rivals as van Beinum, Munch, Karajan, Markevitch—and a very exciting Berlin account under Willem von Otterloo, which briefly enjoyed cult status.”

One of the things that *Great Conductors* does is provide an almost accidental history of recordings, certainly of orchestral ones.

The two Cluytens discs here begin with Bizet’s Symphony in C. It would seem hard to listen to this piece for the thousandth time, but it is a pleasure—even a minor revelation—under Cluytens. He makes the music fresh. Cluytens has a composure about him, and musical common sense. This may not sound like much, but it makes an enormous positive difference in a conductor. Cluytens is always technically correct, but he conveys the spirit of the music, too. His Symphony in C has both Mozartean grace and Romantic punch. The orchestra is not great—the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française—and neither is the sound quality, but it matters little, if at all.

Next come Debussy’s *Images*, in which Cluytens proves beyond doubt that he was a supreme conductor of Impressionism. He is attentive to all the things you would expect him to be attentive to: color, shading, nuance (the very concept seems to require a French word: *nuance*!). And yet he is refreshingly straightforward and clear. He does not let the score get lost in the soup. Nor does he approach the music phrase by phrase, bar by bar; he has a unified, and unifying, view of these pieces.

We then have *La Valse*, and perhaps the highest praise that can be given it is that one can listen to it, happily—after a lifetime of hearing Ravel’s hit, often shabbily performed. The Cluytens recording is exceptionally “atmospheric,” which seems too weak a word, but which suggests something. Suffice it to say that Cluytens achieves the effects the composer desires. His account is woozy and waltzy, but not schmaltzy. He milks everything in it, without violating taste.

Disc 2 begins with Schumann’s Manfred Overture, then goes to a live performance of the *Symphonie fantastique*, from Tokyo (1964). Its intelligence and panache make up for the technical deficiencies of the French players. Cluytens was a significant Wagner

conductor, too—a complete conductor—and we hear him in the Prelude to Act III of *Lohengrin*, rousing and uplifting, even if the cymbals are overexuberant. Last are excerpts from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, something of a Cluytens specialty (though in the Rimsky-Korsakov version). His Boris is another Boris, Christoff, and the conductor imbues this music with unusual strength and true, unforced drama. The pulse is just right. The playing is not bombastic, not overly grand, although this is “grand opera”—about as grand as you can get. It is musical and knowing, typical of Cluytens.

As Robert Layton sums up, here was “a selfless conductor, unconcerned with imposing his own ego on the score; he illuminated the way rather than got in the way. His refined musicianship and unfailing taste shine through all the recordings he has left us.” This is not just nicely eulogistic language for a CD booklet, but true.

Karel Ančerl, the great Czech conductor, had a full, tumultuous life. He was born in 1908, and in the early Thirties studied with Václav Talich (who will also be represented in *Great Conductors*). In 1942, according to Patrick Lambert's notes, Ančerl was “incarcerated in the Terezin ghetto, where despite the terrible conditions, he kept the flame of music burning by founding a string orchestra; he was the only member of his family to survive the Nazi death camps.” He later rose to become director of the Czech Philharmonic, a post he held from 1951 to 1968. “Like many artists of his time,” says Lambert, “he had strong Communist leanings,” and the Czech regime trusted him to travel in the West. In August 1968, when the Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, he was in the U.S., guest-conducting; appalled, he stayed in North America. He spent the last years of his life on the podium of the Toronto Symphony, dying in 1973. Following the Velvet Revolution, his ashes were transported to Prague and reinterred.

We see that *Great Conductors* entails not only musical history and recording history, but “history history,” too.

On his two discs, we hear Ančerl mainly in Czech music: not only in Dvořák, Smetana, and Janáček, but in Novák, Krejčí, and Mácha—also in Martinů's greatly admired Symphony No. 5. But Disc 1 begins with Shostakovich's Festive Overture, in which the conductor and his Czech players are nimble, precise, and alive. Ančerl achieves majesty without pomposity. It could not be clearer that a master wields the baton. He knew that hard thing for a conductor: control without stifling. Szell knew it well; the great Toscanini certainly had the control, but on occasion failed not to stifle.

Ančerl had a particular view of the central Czech music—*The Moldau* and all the rest—and this is a view obviously worth listening to (in every sense). In brief, he thought that Czech music was not accorded enough dignity. As Lambert writes, Ančerl “often found great difficulty, when conducting foreign orchestras, in removing what he called ‘incredible layers of bad taste and bombast, the legacy of the Romantic conception of foreign conductors.’” Indeed, Ančerl's live performance of Dvořák's Symphony No. 8, with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (1970), is far “straighter” than most. The music is fairly lean and spare, while retaining its energy and character. Ančerl maintains strict control of tempos: he is not seduced by unwritten accelerandos, for example. He always has the arc of the piece in mind, not giving away too much, letting the piece unfold naturally.

His tempo in the Allegretto is a little slower than we are accustomed to, and it has an unusual somberness: but it dances as well. Throughout the symphony, the folk elements are played simply—matter-of-factly—and not “dearly.” You can see that Ančerl is keen to avoid any caricature. The trumpet “announcement” at the beginning of the last movement has extraordinary dignity, and this same dignity pervades the movement as a whole. Ančerl's reading may strike many modern listeners as too restrained—and yet it puts the Dvořák Eighth in a different, admirable light.

A Hungarian counterpart of Ančerl was Ferenc Fricsay (1914–1963). The writer Lutz von Pufendorf informs us that Fricsay—who had “Jewish blood” himself—“was court-martialed in 1942 for wanting [merely wanting] to employ Jewish musicians.” He and his family went underground and survived. His principal posts, after the war, were in Germany: the RIAS Symphony Orchestra, the Bavarian State Opera, and the Deutsche Oper Berlin. He died at forty-eight, just reaching his stride.

To begin his discs is a lightish work for so “serious” a conductor: Dukas’s *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*. Yet it is a fine test of any conductor, requiring pace, color, dash, technique. This account may lack Stokowski’s wizardry, being a bit more subdued, but it rivets all the same. Then comes a live performance—from the Salzburg Festival, 1961—of Kodály’s *Dances of Galánta*. The composer was among Fricsay’s teachers at the Liszt Academy, and the conductor makes a superb case for these dances. They are full of nobility and sympathy. Every rhythmic requirement is understood and fulfilled. As with Ančerl, there is no “overconducting” here: Fricsay is without trickery, and without condescension. In addition, the playing is as tight as a drum, the execution exact. Orchestras in those days were well rehearsed, often by martinets.

Fricsay, like most conductors—and most people—was a great lover of Beethoven, and he particularly loved that composer’s lone opera, *Fidelio*. IMG brings us a live broadcast (from 1961) of the Leonore Overture No. 3, in which Fricsay—as Beethoven intended—tells the entire, gripping story of the opera. It unfolds inexorably. It is perhaps a little slow for its own good, but its profundity is clear. What follows—from that same concert—is Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3, the “Eroica.” This too is slow and important, sometimes sliding over into ponderousness. It would certainly not be the first Eroica you gave a person, nor the last you would want to hear—but it has its points to make.

One of the very most interesting and rewarding volumes is that devoted to Nico-

lai Malko, a conductor all but forgotten today. Born in 1883, he studied in St. Petersburg with, among others, Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov. In 1926, he was appointed conductor of the mighty Leningrad Philharmonic, and in that same year he premiered Shostakovich’s First Symphony. By now a teacher himself at the Leningrad Conservatory, he counted among his students Evgeny Mravinsky, who, beginning in 1938, led the Leningrad Philharmonic for fifty years (a record tenure—anywhere). Malko fled the Soviet Union in 1928, while he still could. He freelanced widely, enjoying an association with the Royal Danish Orchestra. He ended his career in Australia, leading the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. When Malko died in 1961, he was a grand old man, admired by his colleagues and respected by audiences—but he had been denied a major and permanent podium that would have guaranteed a reputation and “legacy” matching his ability.

We begin with that Russian favorite, the Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, by Glinka. This performance has less abandon than some—it is less “tossed off”—but it is inarguably well-informed, and even somewhat sweet (if you can imagine the *Ruslan and Ludmilla* overture as sweet). Malko takes the same approach with another sometimes-wild Russian staple, the Trépak from *The Nutcracker*.

In 1935, he recorded Prokofiev’s last symphony, the Seventh, with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London. As Robert Layton tells us, this recording was “rush-released” in order to challenge the version made in America by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Malko’s reading is probing, and also rather contained, with emotions in check. His view is that an orchestra’s playing should not cease to be musical just because the score is Prokofiev’s. His Prokofiev is not all sharp elbows, cackles, shudders, and howls. In fact, this Seventh may be too beautiful for some, too refined, not coarse and nutty enough. There is much delicacy and intimacy here, and the piece sometimes sounds as though it could

be a chamber symphony. But it has the proper impetus and “pow,” too. Above all, this performance is wise. The last movement has some of the same Romanticism, tenderness, and sweep of the composer’s *Romeo and Juliet* score. One may hear the Seventh—all jagged and spooky in one’s head—as though for the first time.

Haydn’s Symphony No. 92—which Malko does with his Danes in Copenhagen—is moving, stately, elegant. Any suggestion that a Russian is unfit to conduct Classical music is destroyed here. The final movement burbles and flits delightfully. This is a recording to play repeatedly, a model of taste—at a time (1953) when Haydn was supposed to be played grossly.

Further proof of Malko’s worth is that he lends dignity and beauty even to the good ol’ Poet and Peasant Overture, by Franz von Suppé. Malko does not consider this music beneath him, or to be played down to; he elevates it. And so it is with the Danish rarity that concludes this volume, Nielsen’s *Mas-karade Overture*, recorded in high spirits in 1947.

The most obscure of IMG’s first fifteen conductors is Ataúlfo Argenta, a Spaniard who lived from 1913 to 1958 (only). His podium career was even briefer than those dates might suggest, as he only started in earnest ten years before his death. Argenta had an abundance of talent, and movie-star looks (as the photos confirm); he might well have been a world favorite. He began his career as a pianist, and in 1941 went to Germany—yes, Germany, in 1941—to broaden his musical education. Carl Schuricht (also among the first fifteen, recall) encouraged him to take up the baton. Argenta went home to Madrid to do so. Alan Sanders’s notes inform us that the conductor recorded about fifty zarzuelas and other Spanish repertoire for Spanish Columbia, and other, more mainstream works in Paris, London, and Geneva, chiefly for Decca. So much had Argenta grown as a conductor that Decca planned to record him in the complete Brahms symphonies with

the Vienna Philharmonic—but there was not time.

We hear this conductor in Liszt (A Faust Symphony), Ravel (the *Alborada del gracioso*), Schubert (the Ninth), and, best, de Falla (the complete *El amor brujo*). The Ravel is unpolished—Argenta’s players in Paris have the flavor of a pickup orchestra—but clear and engaging. The Schubert can hardly compete with the canonical recordings, but it is perfectly respectable, competently judged. *El amor brujo*, as might be expected, crowns this volume. It comes straight from the Iberian Peninsula, and, like Ančerl’s Dvořák or Fricsay’s *Galánta Dances*, it is not “overcooked,” not a caricature. It is, in fact, rather spare, lean-lined—haunting, plaintive, affecting. Its emotion comes quietly, from within, not in outsize wails. We must wonder—as we do about Guido Cantelli and some others—how Argenta would have continued to develop.

As we consider, and revel in, the conductors of the past, we might well consider the conductors of today—and we are apt to lament. Where have they all gone? There are, it is true, some worthy (or even better) conductors: James Levine and Colin Davis; Claudio Abbado and Kurt Masur. Everyone can fashion his own list. Many people are enthusiastic about Simon Rattle, who has just taken over the reins in Berlin. Some place hope in younger maestros: Franz Welser-Möst (who has just taken over in Cleveland), or Daniele Gatti, or the American David Robertson. But even the most cheerful observer would have to admit that we are not exactly awash in great conductors—ones whom the generations of tomorrow would like to hear, and would cherish, in a bursting boxed set.

But, as Lyndon Johnson once said, risibly, “the future lies ahead of us”—and we let it take care of itself. In the meantime, hats should be doffed to IMG Artists. *Great Conductors* is a noble project, depicting—preserving, and giving back—a noble century of conducting.

The media

The aristocracy of feelings

by James Bowman

At what point in the history of the American republic, I wonder, did it become incumbent on its leaders to talk about their feelings in public—presumably as a way of signifying authenticity? In *The New York Times* last month we read that, in response to the news of a bomb that killed seven students, five of them Americans, in the Frank Sinatra Student Center of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, “President Bush expressed his anger,” saying: “I am just as angry as Israel is. I am furious.” Not that he could have felt any other way. The next day, the report was amplified: “I’m furious that innocent life is lost. However, through my fury, even though I am mad, I still believe peace is possible.” No point in getting *too* angry—as angry as Israel is, say, where they increasingly believe that peace is not possible.

But *was* Israel angry? That he could take for granted, apparently, just as he could the motivations of the bombers, whom he described as “killers who hate the thought of peace and therefore are willing to take their hatred to all kinds of places, including a university.” Anger? Hate? No one supposed that the president had any special knowledge about the emotional lives either of Israeli victims or Arab terrorists, but he has clearly learned their parts in the international psychodrama of war and peace, scripted by the media, as well as he has learned his own, which is to feel anger whenever there is another of these “senseless” bombings, and to let the world know about his anger.

It is one measure of the extent to which our politicians and diplomats, almost as much as our pundits and reporters, have accepted the psychological theory of international relations in terms of which war, and terrorism, are the result of overflowings of powerful emotions. The Arabs are angry with the Israelis for occupying what they regard as their land; the Israelis are angry with the Arabs for blowing them up in suicide terror-attacks. And once this assumption is made, it is natural to think of the solution as consisting of the search for ways to assuage that anger. If the Israelis could only compromise and give the Arabs *some* of the land they want, then Arab anger would be less—maybe even enough less to prevent them from perpetrating further suicide-bombings. That in turn would lessen Israeli anger, and so lead to further accommodations between the two sides.

But what if the problem is not emotional? To be sure, emotions are useful if you are nerving yourself to blow yourself up, or to throw rocks at people armed with automatic weapons. And those who have lost friends or family to terror-bombings may safely be assumed to feel anger about it, among other emotions. But to focus on those emotions is to mistake the consequence for the cause. The real reason for the acts of war committed by both sides is not an excess of emotion but the old imperatives of honor that our progressive and individualist culture has almost forgotten. A blow must be answered

by a blow, whether or not you are angry (“don’t get mad; get even,” an American president is supposed to have said not so very long ago), or else you proclaim your weakness and invite further attacks.

This is what Western commentators are fond of describing as “the cycle of violence”—an easy thing to animadvert about if you are standing outside it. Yet to those who are caught up in it—whose numbers once included virtually the whole of the human race—generic “violence” doesn’t exist. There is only my violent act (good) and your violent act (bad). We forget how recent an innovation in human history, and how geographically limited to the fringes of Western Europe and North America, is the innovation in sensibility which regards the violent act not as an irreducible datum in the relationship between two people or nations but rather as a symptom of something else—some emotion which can be treated and calmed by measures short of committing the answering act of violence.

But the media culture is as usual shockingly uninterested in understanding or explaining other cultures than its own. In fact, the juxtaposition of “as usual” and “shockingly,” which sometime had been an oxymoron, is perhaps the media’s one undoubted contribution to the reform of consciousness. Instead, the media folk go blithely on assuming that all the world is as fascinated as they are with the process of observing feelings—for there is a sort of pornographic thrill in dragging into the public forum these essentially private phenomena—and pronouncing on their authenticity. Thus Elisabeth Bumiller of the *Times* proceeds to remark that “the president’s words were his most angry to date about the now-regular bloodshed in Israel and the occupied territories and reflected continuing frustration within the White House about how to stop the cycle of violence.”

Anger? Frustration? The president may not know “how to stop the cycle of violence,” but at least he can reassure us that he has the right kinds of feelings about it,

and about the fact that, apparently, he can’t do anything about it. Of course, these feelings also include sympathy with the victims—“I’m particularly sad today because of American families who cry today and weep at the loss of a loved one”—or pride in the job that American or Israeli soldiers are doing in fighting the terrorists or any number of other feelings, and we can see the media checking them off and making sure that they are the appropriate feelings for the circumstances. But the existence of the feelings, and their sincerity, and not any action that might or might not arise out of them, is what matters.

Bill Clinton understood this when he used to say: “I worked harder than I ever worked in my life” to do something that he couldn’t or wouldn’t do, but that some people expected him to do. That was all right then. The main thing was that he *wanted* to do it. And it was partly because Al Gore never quite mastered the art of public feeling, or of making his feelings (such as they were) look genuine, that he failed to succeed his mentor. There has lately been a delicious postscript to the story of this incapacity in Gore’s quasi-confessional announcement to supporters that he was mistaken in 2000 in relying too much on the advice of pollsters and consultants and that he had resolved to “just let it rip” in any renewed assault on the political heights. This from a man who at one point during the campaign had eight different pollsters on his payroll! As Brent Bozell of the Media Research Center commented: “After working in an administration that paid untold millions of dollars to pollsters and consultants to package itself, Gore now blames the pollsters and consultants for their undue influence.”

Unlike his predecessor, President Bush at least seems to have a conscience about relying *entirely* on having the right feelings for our approval. That, I take it, is why he added that “even though I am mad, I still think peace is possible,” as he was about to begin a meeting at the White House with King Abdullah of Jordan. But King Abdullah too, in

prospectively thwarting the presidential will (according to Ms. Bumiller) to use Jordan as a staging ground for an invasion of Iraq, “just needs to know how I feel.” The king, like everybody else, must expect the president to tell us of his feelings, whether of anger or grief or pride or joy or sorrow or patriotism or gratitude or love, for that is how he lives up to his role not as president, who is constitutionally required to have no feelings at all, but as celebrity-in-chief.

Celebrities have always recognized that their status depends on the publishing of details of their ostensibly private and emotional lives, albeit in carefully controlled and scripted form; it is how they give us the assurance we require that they are real people, just like us, and so are deserving of their elevated status. Such revelations normally coincide with the release of a new movie or album, or the debut of a new television series. Thus we learned this summer that the charming Jennifer Aniston, married to “Hollywood hunk” Brad Pitt and acting up a storm down at your neighborhood multiplex in *The Good Girl*, was (believe it or not) a sleep-walker! She woke up to find herself outside by the pool when the security alarm went off one night, she confided to *US Weekly*. “The alarm scared the s*** out of me,” she said—and out of the hunky Mr. Pitt, who was “terrified because he heard the alarm, and I’m not there—it was just awful.”

No doubt it *was* awful too. But just as every cloud has a silver lining, so the awfulness was just awful enough, but not too awful, to make a story for *US Weekly* (and Reuters, which picked it up, and the *Washington Post*’s website, where I found it) that would confirm that the fetching somnambulist and star of TV’s “Friends” was the kind of star about which such star stories are written. Politicians and others who find themselves in the public gaze *ex officio*, as it were, and not on account of their personal adorability, may prefer to emphasize different emotions, but the feelings-test of personal and political authenticity that they must meet seems less and less distinguish-

able from that of other celebrities with each passing year.

It’s true that, more than most heads of state, the American president has always had something close to celebrity status, at least for so long as there have been celebrities. Maybe something similar happened in ancient times when the people and their rulers never lost eye-contact with one another. “Poor soul, his eyes are red as fire with weeping,” says one of Shakespeare’s plebeians in response to the funeral oration of Mark Antony—a man who could have taken Bill Clinton’s correspondence course. But in America it is only since the introduction of television into politics that politicians have become the show-ponies of the feelings-circus. Perhaps we can hold Richard Nixon responsible, as we can for so many regrettable things in American political life, for his smarmy and mendacious performance as a “regular guy” in the Checkers speech, broadcast during the election campaign of 1952.

At least Nixon knew that he was putting on a performance. With today’s politicians, of both parties, we can’t help wondering if they ever had a genuine emotion, one not carefully shaped and molded and placed before the public for political purposes, in their lives. Are some miners rescued from a watery grave in Pennsylvania? The president is expected to go and express his satisfaction and admiration. Are some children kidnapped in California? The president is expected to show his concern (or possibly anger) by announcing a conference on the subject even if it is only, as Howard Kurtz of the *Post* says, “the kind of showy but shallow initiative that used to draw ridicule for the Clintonites.” Paradoxically, it is not necessary for the feeling itself to be genuine and spontaneous for it to stand as testimony to the genuineness and spontaneousness of the leader.

And do we want genuine emotion anyway? Maybe there is some residual good sense beneath all the glitter of the celebrity culture that tells us that we are really rather glad to think that the president’s anger has been scripted for him, just like his speeches,

and so he is unlikely to do anything rash or foolish as a result of it. Could that have been the ironic subtext when Bush returned to the subject a few days later at the beginning of his vacation, announcing that he was “distressed to hear about the latest suicide bombers in Israel” just as he was about to step out onto the golf course of the Cape Arundel Golf Club in Maine? “There are a few killers who want to stop the peace process that we have started, and we must not let them,” he added, club in hand. “I call upon all nations to do everything they can to stop these terrorist killers. Thank you. Now watch this drive.”

According to *The Washington Post* reporter, “The abrupt segue illustrates the dilemma Bush will face over the next month as he relaxes and works at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, at a time of global political volatility.” Volatility, eh? Can we expect more “frustration” perhaps—or maybe even more “anger”—at all that “volatility”? But to one less schooled in the language of the great public psychodrama brought to us each morning

with our coffee, “the abrupt segue” might rather have suggested that the president faced no “dilemma” at all, hence no frustration and no anger either. He was playing golf as he always does in the summer, and if his “distress” was not going to interfere with his day on the links, it was unlikely to interfere with the performance of others of his presidential duties.

Of course it may be only that Bush, as Elisabeth Bumiller quotes Ken Raynor, the pro at Cape Arundel, as saying, “plays to relax and to forget the mounting pressures of his office”—which with a bit of a stretch would meet the feelings test of presidential competence. Stress could explain his brief lapse from feelings-decorum, and it might even elicit feelings of sympathy for himself. It certainly does from Mr. Raynor, the golf pro, who told the *Times* and Ms. Bumiller that the president had “business at hand, and I can sense that. I feel for him.” Moreover, the golf-feelings seem to have got tied up with (naturally creditable) filial ones when

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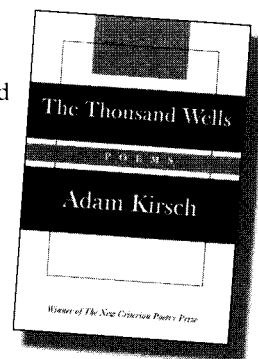
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the president called out to the press pack to applaud one of the drives of his father and predecessor in office, who made one of the foursome. "Let's hear it," he said, for the ovation would "Make the old boy feel better."

Yet as Bush stepped to the tee ("hooking at first, but getting a solid shot the second time" as the reporter, Mike Allen, dutifully informs us), he may have had a purpose other than golf on his mind—which is why he also joked about how the Rangers had beaten the Red Sox the night before and "slouched in the golf cart and played the hot dog," as Mr. Allen reported, "steering and punching the accelerator from the passenger seat." A week or so later he was at it again, this time at the Ridgewood Country Club in Waco, Texas in reply to a reporter's question about the possible war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. "The consultation process is a positive part of really allowing people to fully understand our deep concerns about this man, his regime, and his desires to have weapons of mass destruction. Last question—and then I've got to go chip and putt for a birdie [laughter]. It was a good drive."

The incongruity between this kind of badinage and the ghastliness of the military and diplomatic deliberations which the press could hardly have failed to notice made a counterpoint to them might have suggested either cynicism or stupidity in the First Golfer. Were his boyish high spirits a slip that inadvertently revealed his true state of mind under the façade of appropriate feeling, or was he just too dumb to know what the appropriate feeling was without his script? Without ruling out either of these possibilities, I would like to think that there might be a third.

He might, that is, have wanted people to know that he knew he was acting a part in playing the media's feelings game. He might have tipped the boys in the press pool a wink by way of saying that he was enough of an aristocrat himself not to be so impressed as they have to be with the aristocracy of feeling. This is the political philosophy of the journalistic culture: rule by those whose

feelings are most creditable and authentic. That's why Lloyd Grove of the *Washington Post* found a juicy story in the fact that "Grieving relatives of American students killed in the July 31 bomb attack at Israel's Hebrew University are upset that they haven't heard from President Bush or anyone else at the White House." And he quotes from a letter which one Stephen Bennett, a cook from Charleston, South Carolina and cousin of one of the victims, sent to the president—a copy of which he thoughtfully forwarded to Mr. Grove. "I am writing you . . . to express how disappointed and frustrated I am with the way you . . . have handled this situation. My Aunt Linda, Uncle Michael and cousin Lisa Bennett are heartbroken. . . . There should have been some kind of communication of condolence from you, the president." Another relative compared his behavior with that of his predecessor: "[he] would not only have called the families, he probably would have shown up at the funerals."

Ah, as Camille Chamoun, the former president of Lebanon, said of Dwight Eisenhower (who had sent 15,000 marines to put down a revolt in his country in 1958): *C'était un vrai président!* If the chief task of the head of state is not actually to do anything but only to show that he shares fully and passionately in the sorrows and the joys of people in the news, Clinton may yet go down in history as our greatest president. But for that to happen, the one thing that must never be said, and yet that is unquestionably true, is that feelings, like elementary particles, can never be both public and authentic, can never be observed and at the same time distinguished from the process of observation. As the business of journalism is increasingly the trafficking in these feelings, the journalist must never acknowledge that those feelings which are of absorbing interest to him are also elicited and shaped and made public in response to that interest. And yet the president may. Is that then what our president was doing in his horse-play on the golf course while people were suffering? One would like to think so.

Books

Who's he?

by William F. Buckley, Jr.

Joseph Epstein's new book about snobbery¹ ends up being a book about Joseph Epstein, which is perfectly okay—provided one is Joseph Epstein. Another's book about snobbery, displaying the author's biography, his likes and dislikes, suspicions, affections, affectations, crotchets, would not guarantee against a reader's strayed attention. There isn't the slightest risk of this happening upon reading Epstein's book, because he is perhaps the wittiest writer (working in his genre) alive, the funniest since Randall Jarrell.

Epstein sets out dutifully to tell us what a snob *is*—what he does, thinks (about nubile objects of snobbery), cultivates, disdains. He accomplishes this by conveying everything that Epstein is not. He is not ignorant, certainly not a Philistine, and he is perfectly capable, even if some effort is required, of transcending snobbish inclinations, though not always willing to do so. He is dogged in pressing home on the reader that he, *Joseph Epstein*, is human, experiencing, and giving way to, occasional temptations if not exactly to snobbery, to snobbish practices. He invites us to smack our lips over Joseph Epstein, Jaguar owner, the young man with the Burberry coat who has now a \$300 fountain pen. But his way of telling you about such vulnerabilities is so fetching you want to reach through the

confessional screen and embrace the sinner. And anyway, all that stuff about incidental luxuries doesn't really matter. "My snobbery," he sighs, "is of a different kind, the kind I think of as intellectual snobbery."

Here is the deal on Name Dropping, one of twenty-four subjects he gives a chapter to (others: Jobs; Waspness; Class; Taste; Status; Clubs and clubability; Intellect; Politics; Celebrityhood; "Fags and Yids;" the Dining Table; and "With-it-ry"). He begins by coming clean on his own indulgences. We are to know that the young Joe Epstein bruited it about that he knew personally two champion boxers and also a comedian (Morey Amsterdam), to be sure, a comedian "whom I don't think it would be imprecise to describe as a third banana."

My name-dropping fell off until I became an editor of a scholarly magazine [*The American Scholar*] that had an editorial board with some highly droppable names from the worlds of art, intellect, and scholarship: Lillian Hellman, Jacques Barzun, and Diana Trilling are a representative sample. Later I was made a member of the National Council on the Arts, which caused business in this line to pick up substantially. At quarterly meetings in Washington, I met and spent a fair amount of time with Celeste Holm, Robert Joffrey, Roberta Peters, Martha Graham, Toni Morrison, Robert Stack, Helen Frankenthaler, and other men and women who are, as the English say, rather namey. Some I came to like, some I thought

¹ *Snobbery: The American Version*, by Joseph Epstein; Houghton Mifflin, 274 pages, \$25.

greater bores than are found on a howitzer, some I had no feeling about at all. By now most of those still alive probably have little or no memory of me.

That opening whets the appetite, which will be completely gratified. Epstein goes on to tell us tantalizingly about further adventures with droppable names.

"I had a three-year friendship in the late 1970s with Saul Bellow [*Three years? What happened?* You will run into Bellow elsewhere in the book.] I was once taken to a Chicago Bulls basketball game—in the \$350-a-seat front-row section [Invite Professor Epstein to a basketball game? Expect to seat him in the royal box.]—by Gene Siskel, whose fame came from his television show on the movies with Roger Ebert [*This is cunning. We are supposed to know who Siskel and Ebert are.* Is it snobbish to plead ignorance? Certainly it would be snobbish to *pretend not to know*]. Before the game he introduced me to Oprah Winfrey, who seemed, like many another early middle-aged woman, tired after a tough day at the office. [*This is what the true cosmopolitan would bother to notice in Oprah Winfrey: That she looks tired.*] I had coffee and dessert with Dick and Lynne Cheney at the Four Seasons Hotel in Washington [Dessert? Did they call him over only after the main course?] and Lynne Cheney at another time had a light dinner at my wife's and my apartment before giving a talk at Northwestern University. [Why was the dinner light? Why *tell* us it was light? Is a snobbish purpose being served? Why not have a *special* dinner for Lynne? Or would that be . . . slavish?] I was once the only guest on The Phil Donahue Show, in connection with a book I wrote about divorce [Tantalus here: his own divorce?], a ninety-minute show that felt just a tad longer than a bad fiscal quarter. In connection with the same book, I was the subject of a most unreal article in *People*. [*People* has never more deftly been shown to the foot of the table.] I've dined with five Nobel Prize winners, three in economics, two in physics. I went to high

school with the film director Philip Kaufman, who remains a friend. One of Monica Lewinsky's attorneys is another friend of mine. I had a whitefish dedicated to me and Pierre Boulez by a great though too-little-known chef named Ben Moy. I occasionally receive nice notes from Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. I've never, alas, slept with, or known anyone who slept with, Rita Hayworth [The "alas" here is an uncommon common touch in Epstein.] With that, I believe I had got most of the name-dropping out of my system."

That's it. Epstein was off to another running start. And while doing this, the character and personality of the snob-taxonomist are artfully limned.

Plenary indulgence in hand, Epstein goes to town on his name-dropping virtuosos.

There is Picasso biographer John Richardson, title holder. Epstein quotes from Richardson's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*. "I told Princess Margaret the story of Picasso's quest for her hand."

Epstein gives us the scene. Attending a music festival in Aix-en-Provence, Richardson was "longing for sleep, but, 'unfortunately, Segovia, most revered of classical guitarists, had the room above mine, and was practicing for a concert later in the week.' When Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis attempted to visit Chateau Castille, the house in France that Richardson lived in with his friend Douglas Cooper, Richardson is able to report Cooper's delight in telling friends: 'The Onassis woman tried to invade my house, but I sent her packing.'"

The whole idea of name-dropping is to bring up a personal encounter with someone whose name generates awe, curiosity, or a pang of envy. Something that a revealed historical familiarity with the two prize fighters and the failed comedian would no longer do, now that Joe Epstein had grown up and got around. We are reminded that a snob can only attain true satisfaction at the expense of others. If everybody knew Segovia, not many points could be had from complaining that his

guitar next door kept you awake. If everybody has a fur coat, what, actually, does a fur coat then do for you? The only excuse for having one would be that it keeps you warm, even as a stretch limo allows you to stretch out your legs. Epstein goes on to capture perfectly the volatility of snobfare. John Sparrow, the warden of All Souls College, “used to save the letters of the poet Edith Sitwell, though she never saved his. But once he became warden of the prestige-laden All Souls, Miss Sitwell began saving Sparrow’s letters, at which exact point John Sparrow ceased to save hers.”

Snobbery is a recent phenomenon, however organic the appetites that foster it. We are informed that there are no snobs in Shakespeare, Dante, Aristophanes, or the Bible. The principal support system for snobbery came with caste, most rigid in Great Britain. In America we had Waspness. After that, wealth. But these infrastructures of snobbery are slipping away as we dither on about them. A nobleman in Great Britain becomes, more and more, simply that. As in “Henry Mortimer V.” The Waspocracy has all but disappeared as a class-identifying blood line, and rich people don’t any longer constitute a dominant class—there are too many of them. The public can envy the resources of the rich, but the rich can’t get to the head of any coveted line merely by touting their wealth.

Snobbery of opinion, on the other hand, is an undepletable reserve. Epstein revels in it. “Someone tells me that he thinks, say, *Death of a Salesman* is a great play, and my mind goes—click—foolish opinion, betraying a want of intellectual subtlety, a crudity of sensibility.” Here Epstein acknowledges the infirmity of inverse snobbery. A sentient snob is naturally attracted away from popular enthusiasms. “Twenty-five years or so ago, I thought Humphrey Bogart a swell actor; the Bogart cult killed it for me. I mock—though never to their faces—people I know who buy what I think crappy modern art, pretending to enjoy it. If lots of what I take to be indiscriminate, and there-

fore non-discriminating, people take something up I can almost always be relied upon to put it down, at least in my mind.” There is danger in opposing categorically that which is popular, and awful danger in assuming that the discriminating eye will always make out the superior—“[E]ntire ages have vastly undervalued individual works, often whole bodies of visual art, whose majesty is now thought to be beyond argument.”

Professor Epstein gives a few keys to sound deportment in life in the whirls of snobbery and affectation. To begin with, one should be cautious about language. “The title ‘professor’ always convey[s] a slight comic tinge, and was also conferred on the man who played the piano in the bordello.” Much of necessary accommodation to modern life is done by declining to court singularity, while declining also to disavow what is singular. “Otto Kahn, the successful New York financier, whose assimilationist efforts caused him to be described as ‘the flyleaf between the Old and New Testament,’ once told a friend, ‘You know, I used to be a Jew.’ ‘Really?’ the friend is said to have replied. ‘I used to be a hunchback,’ making the point that, even with vast financial and social resources, it is not so easy to de-Judaize oneself.”

The young man who cherished not so much the Burberry coat as the ownership of it is knowingly submissive to many social norms. “In my own dress and manner, I would like to think myself existing in a permanent state of ironic conformity to the decorum of the day.” He quotes Harold Brodkey. “We want to be dressed, and we want others to be dressed somewhat similarly, partly for the democracy of it, and partly so that we are speaking a halfway common language.” But important that when you do this, you should know that you are doing it. The irony permits you to genuflect to the queen.

Accommodation with convention requires us to go along even with major delusions, most prominent of them, opines Epstein, that college education does no

more for American youth than supply them the satisfaction of a college degree. Professor Epstein's own guess is that not more than two percent of those who attend college are lit up, intellectually and culturally, by the experience. "Most people come away from college, happy souls, quite unscarred by what has gone on in the classroom. The education and culture they are presumably exposed to at college never lay a glove on them. This is the big dirty secret of higher education in America."

Well . . . Joseph Epstein's standards are exacting and a bit idiosyncratic, but his marksmanship is keen. The book is rich with barbs. "Outside America, the Susan Sontag act never quite took flight. She never caught on in France. And why, after all, should she have, doing as she did an imitation of a French intellectual when the French had more than enough of the real thing on hand." *The New York Review of Books* is Sontag's habitat. Speaking of which, "If one wanted to study intellectual snobbery in America through a single institution, one could scarcely do better than peruse the contents of and contributors to that bi-weekly journal." The *Review* has made the "snobbishly brilliant connection between high culture and radical politics, making left-wing views seem integral to high-brow culture. The Anglophilic role in the magazine was [always] large; some issues had more English than American contributors. A joke went the rounds that when one of the journal's two principal editors went to London, he was treated as if he were the Viceroy of India home on furlough."

And Epstein is very wise, and penetrating. Good taste, he summarizes, is really "good sense." Good sense in friendship, "represented by tact, generosity, and above all kindness; in possessions, by comfort, elegance, utility and solidity; in art by beauty, harmony, and originality, in culture, by a discriminating tolerance for tastes at odds with one's own." (This tolerance does not extend to *Death of a Salesman*.) "The

other way—taking pleasure in cutting oneself away from the mass by the criterion of ostensible good taste, and putting down others by the standard of what one takes to be one's own exquisite taste is, of course, the way of the snob."

Snobs should read this book. Also, anti-snobs. Also those who wonder whether they are more like twentieth-century man, or, actually—deep down—more like Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Dante, and Christ.

The sweetness of things

Victor Brombert Trains of Thought: Memories of a Stateless Youth.

W. W. Norton, 320 pages, \$25.95

reviewed by David Pryce-Jones

How faraway and long ago Europe's great past now seems. There were injustices and inequalities, to be sure, but also diversity, character, leisure, and liberties, all of which Hitler and Stalin between them killed off, to leave a continent of charnel-houses and memories. The mainsprings of Europe's social and intellectual life have not recovered. Infinitely dreary, today's Europe pretends to a culture and a creativity that it no longer has. There is no point regretting what cannot be mended; nostalgia is only a form of self-pity. But it is possible to keep the record for those who are still curious about the past, or who wonder if things had to turn out as they have done. And this is what Victor Brombert has done in *Trains of Thought*, a memoir of the years when the totalitarian waves were first breaking over Europe, and nobody could any longer be sure of the future. He writes with brio and a sense of elegy, in command of every last scrap of cherished detail. He is a guardian of the flame, or one of those whom Stendhal called "the Happy Few."

Quite representative people in their sophistication and their success, the Bromberts had prospered in their native Russia. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 put an end

to that. There began what was to be an ordeal, and that was representative too. They first fled to Leipzig, and there in 1923 Victor was born, little Vitka, Vitienka to his father, Vicky to his friends. In exile too was Dyedushka, his grandfather, an engineer who had owned sugar refineries and railway investments. Every day he ate an omelet for lunch, and every day he commented, "It was good, but it was better yesterday." Grandmother Anna Vassilievna insisted that little Vitka recite Lermontov and Pushkin in Russian. She taught him the dignity and self-respect with which to avoid *raspushchinast*, an untranslatable word for moral anarchy. Other members of the family came too, Aunt Anya, Cousin Sascha, Cousin Yula, and others. At his first school in Leipzig, Herr Oberlehrer Prager and Herr Lehrer Brenner further taught him German but punished him as a six year old for walking with the girls in break.

At the center of this memoir, naturally, are his parents, Jascha and Mama. Evoking them, he regrets that he did not manage to reciprocate the unquestioning love they showed him. For him, it seems, their qualities and their foibles were too close to be disentangled. Small, bald, and short-sighted, Jascha was so careful with himself that he could be rather ridiculous, for instance brushing his scalp till it went red; a worrier and a hypochondriac who took cures in spas like Marienbad; something of a *frant* (Russian for a dandy); an admirer of Chaliapin and a Russian cabaret singer called Vertinski, but himself in the habit of singing snatches of opera out of tune. So afraid of fire was he that he put extinguished matches under water. "Be reasonable" was Jascha's slogan, which young Victor interpreted as timidity and submission. Reproaching himself now for the way he once could patronize so indulgent a parent, he writes, "A father doesn't need to be taught to see through his son."

Mama had been a Red Cross nurse in Moscow. She had a period stylishness, large-brimmed hats, French perfumes, and a racy English car, a green Graham Paige.

Somehow she was related to Vera, the wife of the novelist Vladimir Nabokov. Smoking flattened Turkish cigarettes between her long fingers, she played championship bridge. She pronounced "Don Juan" as the Spanish do, danced the foxtrot with her son, read him Gogol, and took him to the movies where they both liked to weep. One day, through the open bedroom door he caught sight of Mama slapping an astonished Jascha. Full and considered as these portraits are, Brombert can sometimes be elliptical and reticent, too much so. Not till halfway through the book do we discover that Jascha was in the wholesale and export business, and we never learn Mama's name. His sister Nora died when she was small, and again for no evident reason we never learn the cause of what must have been a determining tragedy for the family.

Escaping from the rising shadow of Hitler, the family moved on at the beginning of the Thirties to Paris, to the splendors of the Sixteenth Arrondissement with its Second Empire stone houses and heavy squares of chestnuts and gravel, the Eiffel Tower in the background, and the Bois de Boulogne within walking distance. Other White Russians formed a social circle with them. Summers were to be spent at Cabourg, Deauville, or Nice, and winters in Megève. Little Vitka promptly acquired the new nationality of French, and with it yet another language. So fast was the process of assimilating that he had become ashamed of his father's mannerisms and foreign accent. Jascha enrolled him in a fashionable tennis club, and once arrived to watch him play. "What are you doing here?" Victor asked him, mortified now to remember it. November 11, Armistice Day in 1918, happened to be also his birthday, and his father would take him to the great military parade on the Champs Élysées, with the band playing the Marseillaise and the "Sambre et Meuse." The very idea of France, he says, began to stir him in a way that Russia or Germany did not.

By his own account, at the well-known

but forbidding local Lycée Janson he was not a good pupil. Too much truancy, too much interest in jazz and girls and *surprises-parties*, which the French pronounce as if it were not an English borrowing. With his friend Jacques Blum, he visited One-Two-Two, the brothel in the rue de Provence which many celebrities frequented then and later during the German occupation, and about which books have been written. To pay for his visit, he stole a piece of Russian silver from his father. But at the lycée nevertheless, teachers familiarized him with Coleridge and Wordsworth, Ariosto, Montaigne, and Victor Hugo, and on his own he discovered minor writers, for instance Lajos Zilahy, a Hungarian novelist, and Paul-Jean Toulet, a poet who coined a phrase, *la douceur des choses*, the sweetness of things, which seized Victor's imagination. High culture was a matter of course, something natural and lasting to be enjoyed even by—or especially by—a schoolboy and a refugee. To be attached to the life of words, he writes, means to take possession “of sounds and signs that are charged with echoes, reminiscences” and yet also carry at their core a permanence. By no means an idle luxury, the taste for literature has a moral quality.

Jascha perceived that there was a flaw in France: the French had not grasped that they were sleepwalking to disaster. This was not another of his personal anxieties. From experience he knew that there was no justification either for Communism or for Nazism, yet these twin ideologies were already holding the future of France in the balance, and nobody appeared to be aware of it. But in a little portent of what was to come, at the lycée a lanky boy with the name of Roussot called Victor a “dirty Jew.” Anti-Semitism to the Bromberts was a fact of life. A family story had it that a cousin, a soprano, while singing with Chaliapin, had heard him mutter at her the derogatory Russian “*zhid*.” One year at Marienbad, Victor had done his *barmitzva*, but he says that he had been brought up with “resigned and ironic skepticism” about everything.

Now in a fight, he bloodied Roussot's nose. And what are the likely choices taken by Roussot a few short years later under German occupation?

A photograph in the book shows Victor in the final summer before the war, the final summer of a whole way of life. Youthful, hopeful, handsome in shorts and a jacket, he was at Deauville with friends, among them Danielle Wolf, or Dany, a pretty and sporty-looking girl for whom he felt a forlorn and unrequited love. What followed, he writes, had the inevitability of a bad dream. War exposed for all to see that France had indeed sleepwalked into disaster. Like so many others, the Bromberts scurried to and fro, from Deauville to Paris, by train to Bordeaux in the exodus of June 1940 under the impulse of the German blitzkrieg, to various places in the still unoccupied Vichy zone, and finally Nice, where they rented an apartment. The seventeen-year-old Victor made friends, enjoyed himself on the Lido, and explored the countryside on a bicycle. In reality, anti-Jewish legislation had placed them all in danger of deportation and death. The Vichy government agreed to hand over to the Germans all foreign-born Jews. Aunt Anya and Danielle Wolf were among those eventually murdered in Auschwitz.

Timid as he may have seemed with his poor eyesight, Jascha now showed what he could do. His calm persistence was nothing short of heroic. Victor confesses how he let it be known that all the talk about the deadliness of doctrines and ideologies bored him, whereupon he heard his father give him the advice: “Go read Montesquieu.” The Spanish frontier was closed. But Jascha had heard of Varian Fry and the American-run Emergency Rescue Committee which found ways to help people flee abroad. Patiently he badgered the American consulate in Marseille until he brought off the feat of obtaining—and synchronizing—American immigration visas, French exit visas, Spanish transit visas, and finally boat tickets at a thousand dollars a person, a sum which must be multiplied many times for today's

equivalent. How all this was paid for is something Victor does not know. Others fortunate enough to escape by this route included Hannah Arendt, Jacques Lipchitz and Marc Chagall, Franz Werfel, and Lion Feuchtwanger—and at the very last moment, the aged grandparents too.

The ship the Bromberts caught from Seville was a crowded and unhygienic banana boat evidently operated by wartime profiteers. In New York, safe at last, they moved into a building on the Upper West Side. Jascha and Mama fade from the story as Victor goes through yet another process of assimilation, speeded-up by circumstances. His parents had had the foresight to send him before the war to England, where he had learnt the language, his fourth. At Harrisburg Academy in Pennsylvania, for the first time he did himself justice as a student. By the winter of 1942 he was a soldier with an army dog tag on which was stamped his number and the letter J for Jewish—a handy tip for the Germans if he had been captured.

On account of his linguistic skills, he was soon training as “a combat intelligence specialist.” Promoted master-sergeant and posted to England, he landed with the 2nd Armored Division on Omaha Beach on D-Day +2. Nothing in his background and education, nothing in the several literatures of his reading, had prepared him for the fear and closeness of death that lay ahead. In some forty vivid pages he describes the Normandy campaign as he experienced it, and the German counterattacks in Hürtgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge. Interludes in liberated Paris brought some semblance of normality. His only regret is that he behaved badly to some captured Nazis, pulling the beard of one in order to discover if the man had known about the camps, and depriving another of a box of pills. In these acts he kept seeing the face of his father, “who was distressed at the mere thought of hurting someone’s feelings.”

Through this memoir run images of trains, the comfortable trains that once conveyed

the Bromberts to pleasure spots, and the sealed cattle wagons taking Aunt Anya and Danielle Wolf to Auschwitz. Never again will there be the poet’s sweetness of things, and never again will the stain of mass-murder be lifted. After the war, Victor Brombert went to Yale and became in that setting what he was destined to be anyhow, a man of taste and sensitivity, a professor and author of erudite books doing justice to admired writers. It amuses and alarms him to realize that he has inherited many of his father’s worries and hypochondria, as well as some of his mother’s stylish idiosyncrasies. But his parents had given him the gift of a humane culture which America has allowed him to express and enjoy. He says farewell to Europe and its past with much regret, but even more thankfulness.

The Baroness Munchausen of sex

Catherine Millet

The Sexual Life Of Catherine M.

Translated by Adriana Hunter.

Grove Books, 224 pages, \$23

reviewed by Anthony Daniels

On street corners a couple of hundred yards from where I write this, prostitutes stand in the hope, and no doubt the expectation, of passing trade. They look as if they had stepped straight from the work of Otto Dix or George Grosz: and they go straight from the age of fourteen, when they start their career, to the age of forty-nine, without appearing ever to have passed through the intervening years.

In like mysterious fashion, Catherine Millet, the author of this memoir of her sexual life that the *Kirkus Review* found both oddly charming and deeply pornographic, passed directly from first communion to orgiastic group sex without so much as batting an eyelid. As far as can be deduced from her book, she adopted what she

generously calls the ‘philosophy’ of making herself available to any man, any place, any time, quite arbitrarily, without any reflection whatever. If ever she were to write a Bildungsroman, it would be less than a paragraph long.

The point of this book is her repeated, detailed, and mechanical description of her sexual encounters and activities. These were so compulsive and so many that one has to pinch oneself to remember that she has a sideline in art criticism as well. The mercifully brief reflections that interrupt her agonizingly long descriptions (narrative would imply a degree of organization that is absent from this book) are pseudo-intellectual banalities expressed with imprecision and disguised by a certain portentousness:

There must be a fairly intrinsic link between the idea of moving in space, of traveling, and the idea of fucking, otherwise the widespread expression “getting off” would not have been invented.

Compared with this, basketball commentary on television is profundity itself.

When it comes to the facts, her veracity must surely be in doubt. Could she really have had sex with thirty men in quick succession in an underground car park in Paris? (This gives new connotations to the words subconscious and subterranean.) At her first meeting with her dentist, he is interested in her mouth more as a receptacle for his genitalia than as an object of dental treatment—and he proceeds to have sexual encounters with all the other women in his waiting room. Waiters in a Moroccan restaurant make explicit sexual contact with her, despite the fact that she is in the company of another man. There are also internal contradictions: a few pages after she claims to have had sex with only one man younger than herself, in all her thousands (or is it millions?) of sexual encounters, she is talking of affairs she has had with younger men. I suspect she is the Baroness Munchausen of sex.

Miller’s book is so bad—it is to eroticism what a minutely detailed account of bulimic bingeing and self-induced vomiting would be to gastronomy—that it is best treated not as a literary, but as a psychological and sociological artifact. Why would anyone have written it? And why would anyone read it (except for review purposes)?

The author offers no clue as to her motive in writing the book. This is just as well, because she is not one for searching self-analysis. Her only explanation for her insatiable sexual appetite is her shyness and inability to make small talk. Finding herself with nothing much to say in social situations, she does not retreat into solitary philately, embroidery, or building model ships: she resorts to nonverbal communication of a certain kind. That is to say, she takes off her clothes and fellates the nearest man who comes to hand, as it were, even if he is an achondroplastic dwarf. If this is shyness, then goodness knows what disinhibition would be: but on her own account, what she really needs is assertiveness training. She has sex with so many, she says, because she lacks the self-confidence to make polite conversation. This is a manifestation of modern gnosticism, in which everything is “really” the opposite of what it seems.

Of course, if much of what is related in the book is not true, she is either a fantasist on an industrial scale, unable to distinguish reality from her imaginings, or a cynically calculating opportunist. If she is a fantasist, her imagination is a deeply impoverished one, an impoverishment that gives to the book its repetitiveness. In a sense, it is quite an achievement to have made so short a book about sex so utterly tedious and unreadable.

Underlying the fantasy, or the reality if that is what she describes, of her life is the wish—one that springs eternal in the mind of humans living under conditions of civilization—to have done with control and restraint, to reach a state in which each desire will be instantly satisfied without the inconvenience of having to wait for, much less forgo, its fulfilment. On this reading of

the human condition, all unhappiness is caused by “artificial” restraints placed upon the expression and satisfaction of desire, and therefore a better society—one whose members will be permanently happy—requires the removal of as many controls on personal conduct, both internal and external, as possible. The good life consists of constantly packing pleasurable moments into its brief span, and anything which interferes with this is to be opposed. A perpetual orgy is thus the summum bonum. In having sex with thirty men in her underground car park, therefore, or in describing the event for the public as if it actually happened, Catherine Millet thinks she is helping to build a better world. How pleasant to do exactly as one pleases for the good of humanity!

Alas, ideological hedonism, adopted to defy or scandalize one’s parents or one’s society, is as joyless as the most die-hard puritanism, of which indeed it is but the mirror image. There are places in the world where sexual morality is easy-going because it has never occurred to anyone that it should be otherwise, and such places are often very charming. They certainly do not give the impression of deliberate and determined brutishness that Catherine Millet’s book gives. The combination of earnestness and frivolity (one that is characteristic of our age) is never attractive to behold: and it is no coincidence that the author comes across as humorless, self-absorbed, and very dull. She is a puritan who has undergone a gestalt switch.

Her book has sold 400,000 copies in France alone, which suggests that longing for, or fantasizing about, the abandonment of all restraint has been far from ended by the sexual revolution, even in a country famed, not altogether justly, for its sexual tolerance. The book’s main appeal is to prurience, a prurience that has been given the *nihil obstat* by literary intellectuals who affect to find virtues in a work that contains innumerable atrocious sentences such as the following, selected at random:

I cannot close this chapter on exchange (which, like a silk worm’s cocoon, covers and constitutes the sexual relationships) without bringing up my only failed attempt at prostitution.

Even allowing for the vagaries of translation, this sentence is an abomination: and if there were any justice in the world, the author would be prohibited from ever publishing another word.

Why have so many critics granted the book the respectful attention it so manifestly does not deserve? The answer, I suspect, is fear of appearing ridiculous, of being sneered at for lack of sophistication. (Indeed, one American reviewer suggested, with implicit superiority of understanding, that the American response to the book was likely to be less sophisticated than the French, because America lacked a literary tradition that included figures such as de Sade: an author whom only masochists could read for pleasure, and only psychopaths for instruction.) Certain categories of books exercise a kind of moral terror over the unfortunates deputed to review them, for example memoirs written by people who are dying of cancer. One has to find them moving and profound, otherwise one is unfeelingly aiming a low blow at a brave author already pretty much down on his luck. Besides, we could all suffer from cancer one day, so that a literary attack on a sufferer is profoundly undemocratic. Moreover, the magical thinking to which we are all sometimes prey suggests that the hubris of unsympathetic criticism will be swiftly followed by the nemesis of the development of cancer in oneself.

The fear that this book has exercised over many reviewers is that of appearing prudish or unfamiliar with human degradation and the seamy side of life, and thus of being naïve and unworthy of attention. To express distaste for the exhibitionism of the life it describes, or fantasises about, or cynically exploits for commercial purposes, is to hold fast to certain (rather minimal) beliefs about how life should be lived and humans should

conduct themselves. This in turn requires a belief that truth is more important than one's status in the eyes of the other members of one's particular guild. And those who refuse ever to nail their colors to the mast are destined always to discover a few years later that, to their chagrin, the whole ship has sunk.

Catherine Miller's book has been described, more than once, as subversive. Naturally, this has been meant as high praise. But what it subverts is all subtlety, humor, irony, decency, and finer feeling. There is actually much more fun to be had at a Church of England summer fête than at one of her orgies: indeed, such fêtes have called forth far better writing than hers. And she proves the truth of one of Voltaire's great aperçus: the way to be a bore is to say everything.

Intellectual decadence

Paul Hollander Discontents: Postmodern and Postcommunist.
Transaction, 395 pages, \$39.95

reviewed by Digby Anderson

Twenty years ago, I made a brief study of the Acknowledgments sections of cook books. Even the great and otherwise restrained Elizabeth David could not resist thanking "countless" other cookery writers for their help in one book. And so does practically every other cookery writer. After "countless," the next most frequent word in such acknowledgments is "secrets." The author thanks the countless other cooks for sharing their secrets though, after this mass and repeated orgy of dissemination, "secrets" seems an odd word to use. Authors also thank their families too in hyperbolic terms and, do you know, not a single cookbook would have been possible without the Herculean labors of the typist.

I thought I was the only person who had noticed this particular source of disgustingly effusive gratitude until I read *Discon-*

tents. Paul Hollander has a whole, hilarious chapter on them. It's a new and entirely happy world in which writing is something only possible through spouses who are unfailingly supportive and loving, students who deluge their professors with insights, children who have selflessly put up with neglect, and publishers and secretaries who have been angels. Paul Hollander is very funny and very cheerful, the very opposite of discontent. His book is a collection of previously published essays on intellectuals and Communism. Both are deeply depressing subjects, but Hollander, while being analytically incisive and damning about them, still retains his good humor. That's a rare and very powerful combination.

The chapters on Communism's toll of 100 million victims describe the horrid details of the crimes and leave no escape routes for apologists and evaders, but he never descends to rant. And he has an eye for the hilarious. Describing the visit of one western "political pilgrim" to North Korea, he quotes the "deluded" traveller: "Kim Il Sung whom we did not meet . . . sent personal greetings. . . . He was no Stalinist. He seemed friendly to religion, regularly visited farms . . . and was frequently in touch with the ordinary people. . . . Some of those we met interpreted him as benevolent . . . more like a patriarchal father who makes final decisions. . . . [He] was respected, admired, even venerated . . . the people liked and believed in him." This visitor saw no tanks and armaments. But in South Korea he was most indignant about "the huge concrete wall initiated by the US military."

Hollander's analysis of the liberal-left intellectual in America is complex. The puzzle is why intelligent people in a rich, healthy America have so many "discontents." Why do they hate their own, very good, society so much? Some dislike modernity itself and are especially resentful of science. Hollander talks of their loss of sense of meaning and purpose. Others feel modern society does not value them enough. Their ambitions and *amour propre* are frustrated. Then there is the cult of victimhood. "On the campuses

and in liberal high-income communities few would question any charge of racism, sexism, homophobia, elitism. . . . Every opportunity is taken to engage in collective self-flagellation. . . . Scepticism about . . . charges is treated as the self-evident proof of the racism (sexism, etc.) of the sceptic."

There is the proliferation of sectional rights which turns both politics and academe into a war of interest groups in which ideology masks and serves self-interest. This allied to a weakness for exculpating determinisms initiates a hunt for systems and interest groups to blame and condemn. In this view, crime, poverty, and educational failure are caused by the moral failure of society or oppressive groups within it, never by individual failure. There's the intellectualist hunger for coherence and neatness. Intellectuals "need to find meaning and coherence in life." They are people with "a chronically unappeased appetite for meaning, justice, and moral truths constantly on the look out for plausible belief systems." In a modern world, "a society in which nothing is sacred and therefore, nothing forbidden," this hunger is constantly and promiscuously titillated. "Such a society is a fertile ground for confusion, alienation, vague longings, and discontents, which give rise to political pilgrimages and other quests for meaning."

Bizarrely coexisting with the search for neatness is the acceptance of contradiction: noticeably the contradiction between the demands of relativism and anti-elitism—that no culture be judged better than any other—and the demands of anti-Westernism that ridicule Western culture and patriarchy together with political correctness. This is even further complicated by arbitrarily contrived judgments of moral equivalence between societies such as the former Communist societies and the United States that are in no way equivalent. It would take an especially brave man today, says Hollander, to declare as one anthropologist did in 1965 that to accord all cultures equal dignity is "not only nonsense but sentimental

nonsense . . . an absurdity to assert that cannibalism, slavery, . . . and killing the aged should be accorded the same dignity as old age security and scientific medicine."

There is the curious way in which the unphysical intellectual is attracted to force in such Communist societies and the even more curious way in which the well-trained mind can suspend critical faculties and indulge in sentimentalism. "Being an intellectual . . . does not provide a protection against fundamentally wrongheaded political judgments, against the urge to submit to unworthy political impulses, against confusing what is with what one would like to be. . . . [The popularity of] multiculturalism, deconstructionism, radical feminism and postmodernism all linked together by an intense aversion to Western culture . . . demonstrate (once more) that intellectuals are capable of suspending their critical faculties, and do so with ease and relish when propelled by what they consider a good cause, or lofty ideals."

There is the attraction of therapy, the hunger for spirituality, and, particularly in political pilgrimages, "the process of enchantment." Hollander quotes Malcolm Muggeridge: "You are frustrated revolutionaries, and the spectacle of a revolutionary government in actual existence so intoxicates you that you fall on your knees, senses swooning in awed worship. . . . You who for so long had to be content with spinning your ideas into words, see in it the possibility of translating them suddenly into deeds."

This is a formidable and fascinating list. One might want to add to it the loss of moral vocabulary, of character anchored in stable family and social class and the elevation of expertise and intellectual fashion over wisdom. Hollander does not really try to tidy up this list of symptoms, diseases, and causes into a theory. He is probably right, for to do so is to give into the temptation of neatness. To my mind he does not actually sort out whether there is too much or too little rationalism in the

current treachery of intellectuals. The closest he comes to an overall explanation is in the repeated use of “decadence” to describe it.

And there is the key question: Is Western society decadent or is the decadence limited to a small intellectual part of it and a passing couple of generations? The word decadence is well chosen. Though many Americans, steeped in a spirit of optimism and progress, will instinctively shrink from words such as “decadence” and “decline,” they are essentially what the debate is about. *Discontents* is a fascinating, erudite, and good-natured book, a book for our time.

Two 'berds in the hand

Hugh Massingberd, editor

The Very Best of The Daily
Telegraph Books of Obituaries.
Pan Books, 407 pages, £9.99

Hugh Massingberd

Daydream Believer.
Macmillan, 310 pages, £16.99

reviewed by Ben Downing

“Are you familiar with the work of the Master?” was the first question Hugh Massingberd used to ask aspiring obituarists, by which he meant not Henry James but P. G. Wodehouse. I can think of no more congenial or reassuring inquiry from a prospective employer. In the context of death notices, though, it isn’t quite what one expects to hear. And yet Massingberd, during his 1986–1994 tenure as obituaries editor for *The Daily Telegraph*, applied a Wodehousian aesthetic—call it the Blandings sublime—to such good effect that the once-ignored column attracted a cult following and spawned no less than five bestselling anthologies, of which the current volume purportedly represents la crème de la crème.

What then, in obituary terms, does the lesson of the Master dictate? Above all, a preponderance of subjects who are—to use Massingberd’s habitual epithet—fruity. Not

fame or accomplishment but rampant eccentricity is the chief criterion for inclusion. So we are treated to a colorful succession of potty minor peers, “bristling brigadiers” (as Massingberd labels them), and other quintessential English types, all embalmed in equal parts affection and irreverence.

Some of my own favorite obits here, however, are of a different stripe, more roundly mocking and even downright venomous. The one for Billy Carter begins:

Billy Carter, who has died age 51, was President Jimmy Carter’s hard-drinking roly-poly brother whose bibulous verandah-chair comments from the peanut township of Plains, Georgia, caused periodic embarrassment at the White House.

What adjectives! One can almost hear the (anonymous) writer smacking his lips with cruel delectation. Similarly, the notorious vixen Barbara Skelton—who has often been proposed as a model for Pamela Flitton in Anthony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time*—is described as having enjoyed a “career of petulant promiscuity.” Skelton achieved a sort of exquisite marital chiasmus: her first husband, Cyril Connolly, divorced her on grounds of adultery with George Weidenfeld, who, having become her second husband, divorced her in turn on grounds of adultery with . . . Cyril Connolly. Of her third marriage, to the physicist Derek Jackson, the obituarist comments: “The union, dominated by Skelton’s menagerie of small violent mammals, was of brief duration.” I’m not quite sure what the middle part of that sentence means, but I shall never cease to savor it.

Daydream Believer is Massingberd’s autobiography. His life has been shadowed by a sense of Peerage Lost, for the baronetcy turned down by his great-grandfather would have devolved on him. In a second abasement, he was cheated of Blessingbourne, the romantic family pile in County Tyrone, and had palmed off on him instead a far lesser estate in Lincolnshire. To com-

pensate for these deprivations, Massingberd threw himself into genealogy, overseeing *The Landed Gentry* and other “stud books” and writing and editing dozens of allied volumes on the British and Irish aristocracy and country houses, until finally he persuaded *The Daily Telegraph*-owning Berry family, who had been “not all that keen on death,” to let him take over the languishing obits, which he gave up only after a heart attack forced him into retirement.

So much for Massingberd’s c.v.—no Sir Richard Burton he. Yet the book’s main focus is not action but thought of a kind. Subtitled *Confessions of a Hero-Worshipper*, it relates how Massingberd, further to blunt the pain of his insufficiently squirearchical circumstances, has since childhood glommed onto one idealized figure after another and woven for himself elaborate fantasy existences, “underpinned by painstaking research.” He has had the good fortune to meet many of his heroes, some of whom “only increased in stature on acquaintance.” Others, however, proved “a grave disappointment,” such as Earl Mountbatten, who, when Massingberd was working on *The Landed Gentry*, tried to pressure him into amending the royal surname to Mountbatten-Windsor.

The earliest objects of Massingberd’s adoration and self-projection were cricketers and jockeys, but soon he turned to literary fetishism. “My fantasy world,” he writes, “began to expand in the 1960s through immersion not only in the works of P. G. Wodehouse but those of Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell and John Betjeman.” From this group Powell—whose great *roman-fleuve* Massingberd claims to reread every year—emerged as his “chief hero.” Although he eventually became friends with “the Sage of the Chantry,” the first time Massingberd met the writer he “persisted in demonstrating the extent of my tabulation of his novels and characters to the point where he felt compelled to protest ‘My dear boy. . . .’” Nor is this the only time Massingberd fell prey to wonkish adulation; as he observes, “The belief that one will somehow endear

oneself to a hero by laboriously reciting his achievements is one of the fallacies of fandom.”

Another literary idol whom Massingberd first embarrassed, then won over, was James Lees-Milne. Before long he found himself accompanying the diarist on one of his country-house inspection tours for the National Trust. Though avowedly heterosexual, Massingberd seems to be what a gay friend of mine calls a “straight fairy,” because people keep pegging him for what he’s not. Just so, at one house

[t]he bachelor owner, jumping to quite the wrong conclusion about the proclivities of Jim’s companion (myself), led us to a garden building adorned with a graphically explicit fresco in the muscular modern neo-classical manner. ‘What d’you think of that meaty young piece, eh, Jim?’ nudged the pederastic squire.

It should perhaps be added, by way of explanation, that Lees-Milne himself did indeed swing both ways.

Daydream Believer is brave (or at least reckless) to a degree, in that it lays its author wide open to one of the most heinous of modern charges, namely snobbery. Massingberd anticipates and fields the accusation deftly. On the one hand, he eagerly catalogs, and indeed seems to exult in, the brickbats that have been hurled his way over the years: *Private Eye* caricatured him as “Massivesnob,” John Gross referred to him as “a snobbish old bore,” etc. On the other, he doesn’t so much refute as deflect the charge, arguing that an obsession with genealogy betokens merely a keen interest in people. It’s a defense that holds up well for Anthony Powell, and one that will stand for Massingberd also.

Another pejorative that Massingberd seems almost to invite is “pathetic.” He wastes no opportunity to make himself look lame, foolish, gauche, or obsequious (ideally all at once) and even admits having, on his bedroom wall, a “pictorial pantheon”

of his heroes. "Self-deprecation," he remarks, "is often a transparent mask for self-regard," but that's not the case here. The strain of abjection in Massingberd's temperament clearly runs deep, and the persona he's evolved for himself, a blend of fogeyish atavism and teenage giddiness, is so peculiar that one can't help warming to it.

Jeremy Lewis—himself the author of a charming autobiography, *Playing for Time*—has argued that, in contrast to poetry and fiction, "autobiography is one area in which the English have excelled in the last half-

century." I'm rather inclined to agree with him, especially given that several of the books on Lewis's list of honor, such as Lees-Milne's *Another Self*, T. C. Worsley's *Flannelled Fool*, and Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*, are personal favorites as well. "The best English autobiographies," Lewis notes, "combine comicality with a sense of the sad absurdity of life," and the same could be said of *Daydream Believer*. If the book comes up a little short of Lees-Milne and company, that is perhaps as the worshipful and ever-modest Massingberd would wish it.

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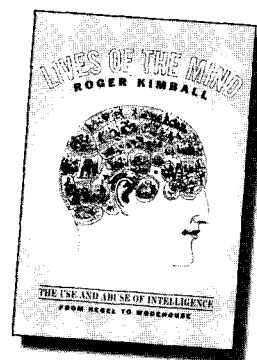


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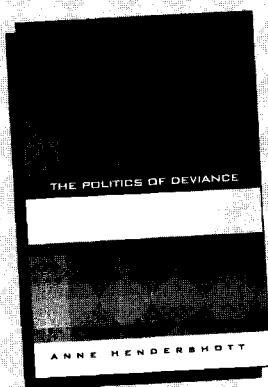
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